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TO MUSIC
AND MORE

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OF 2004

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RUINED MY
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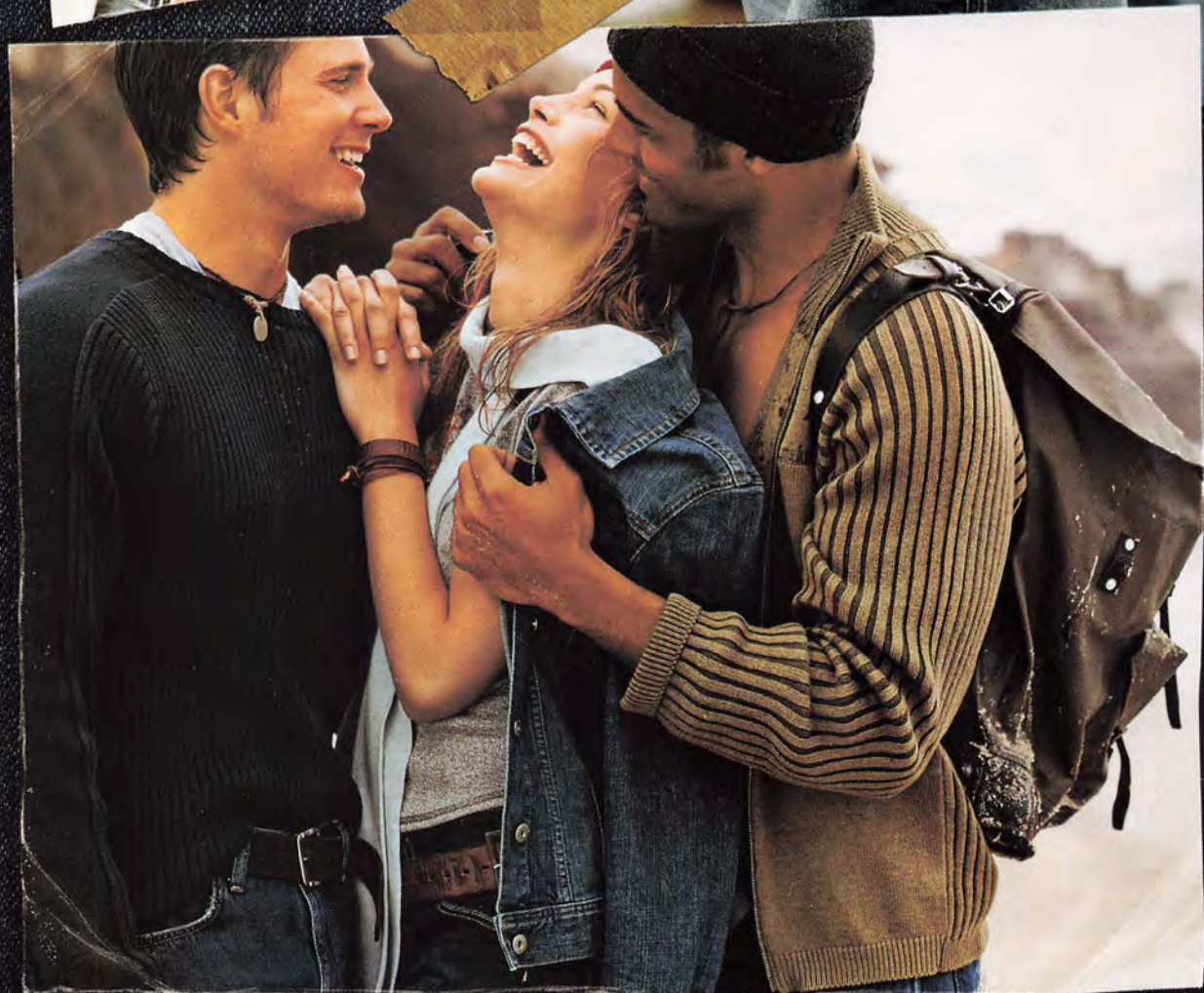
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20
19

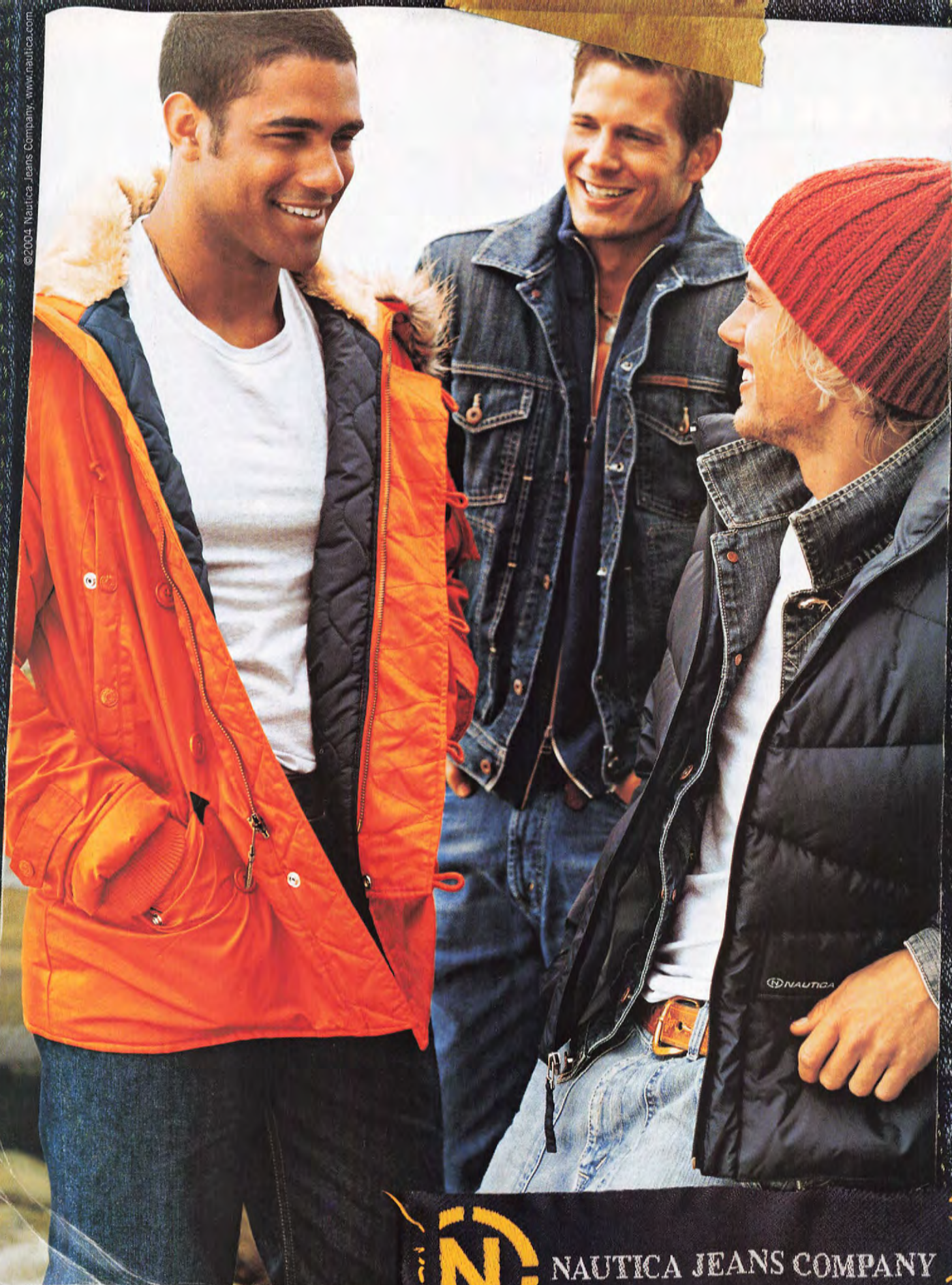


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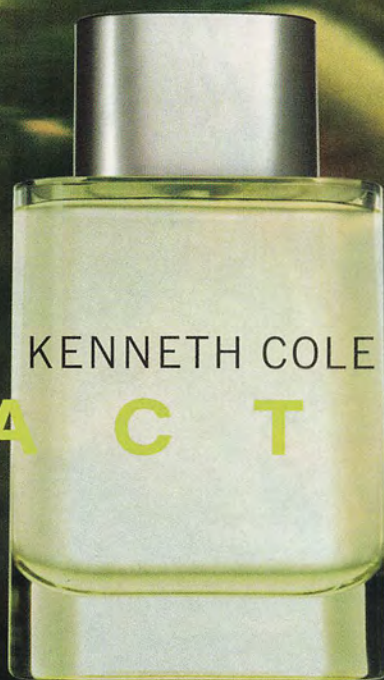

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20 WATCH BLENDER
AND VH1'S
MOST
AWESOMELY
BAD SONGS
OF 2004
SUNDAY,
DECEMBER 5

ON THE COVER

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BLENDER

DECEMBER 2004

FEATURES

70 RICK JAMES

He may have been the inspiration for Dave Chappelle's best-ever sketch. But there was nothing funny about the demons that killed Rick James's career and, ultimately, the man himself. *Blender* investigates the insane life and death of the ultimate super freak.

80 \$848: SIMPLE PLAN

The Canadian mall-punkers spend *Blender*'s loot turning an open-top bus into a clown-car of New York loonies.

84 THE 50 GREATEST CDS OF 2004

Weird Al Yankovic didn't make the cut. But a cornrowed Beethoven, some gaytastic glam boys and a neurotic British rhyme-slinger all did.

94 KANYE WEST

He raps. He produces. He survives car crashes. Just don't ask the self-named "best thing about hip-hop" to be modest.

100 THE 100 BEST SONGS OF 2004

The crunkiest, rockiest, countryest and shoutiest tunes of the year. Plus the top 10 suckiest.

111 THE "WHAT THE F*%@" AWARDS

Remember when Brit grabbed Kev's wood? When the Pope watched break-dancing? We do! *Blender* salutes 2004's kwaziest moments.

120 WOMAN OF THE YEAR: GWEN STEFANI

The No Doubt megastar exclusively tells all about her rock-star husband, her movie career and why she's finally striking out on her own.



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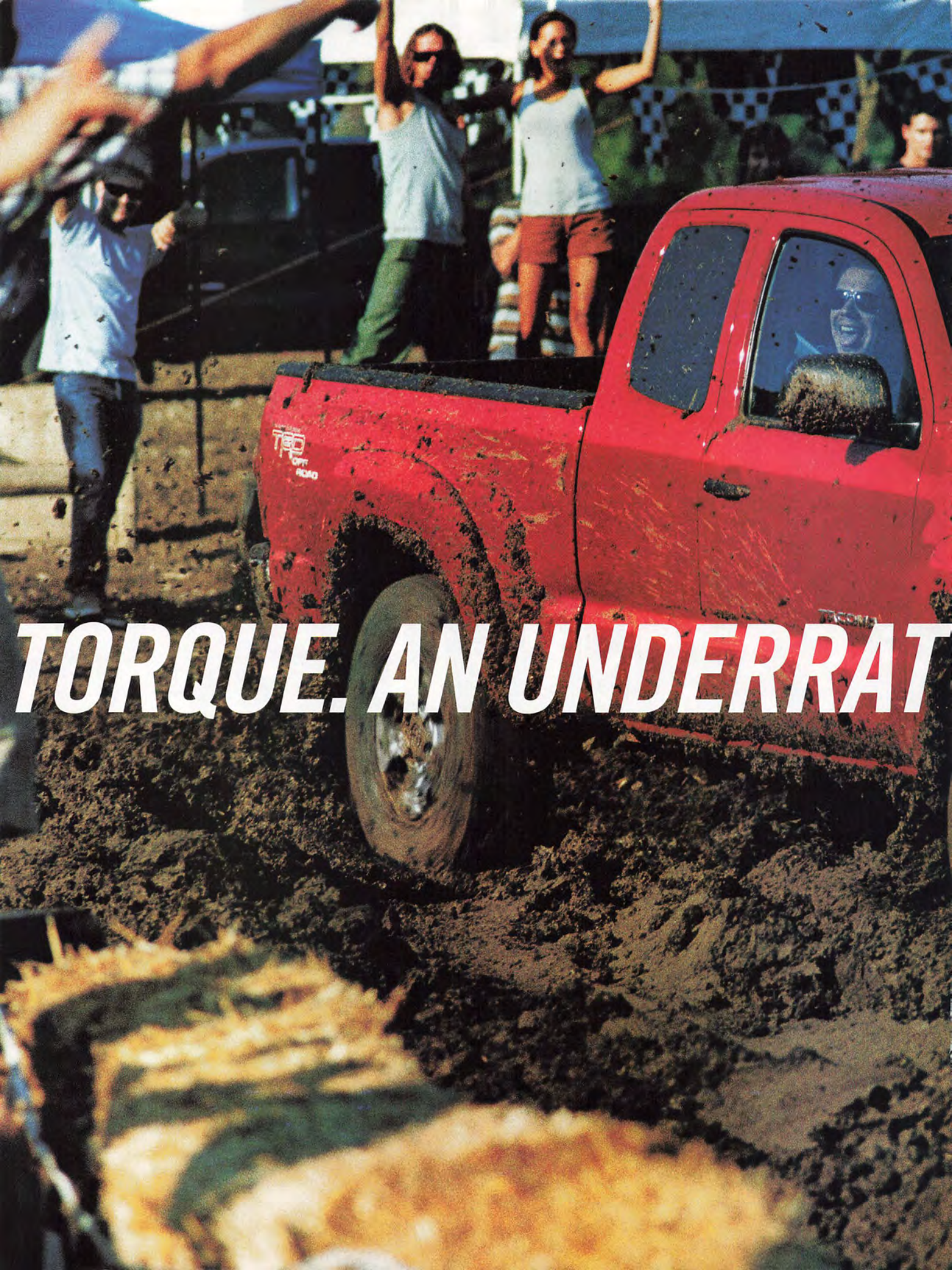
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58

"PORNO STARS RUINED MY MARRIAGE." TOMMY LEE

CONTENTS DECEMBER 2004

REGULARS

20 LETTERS

32 BURNER

Britney lets her Ts do the talking; Paris Hilton spends Labor Day high . . . on life and *Blender* says bye to Johnny Ramone. Plus: Elton and Ozzy lock lips in public!

36 THE NEXT BIG THING!

Regina Spektor, Art Brut

58 DEAR SUPERSTAR

Tommy Lee on Pink, Pam, life in the bing, the biggest ass he's ever met, and that time he shot up Jack Daniel's. Oof!

64 THE GREATEST SONG EVER!

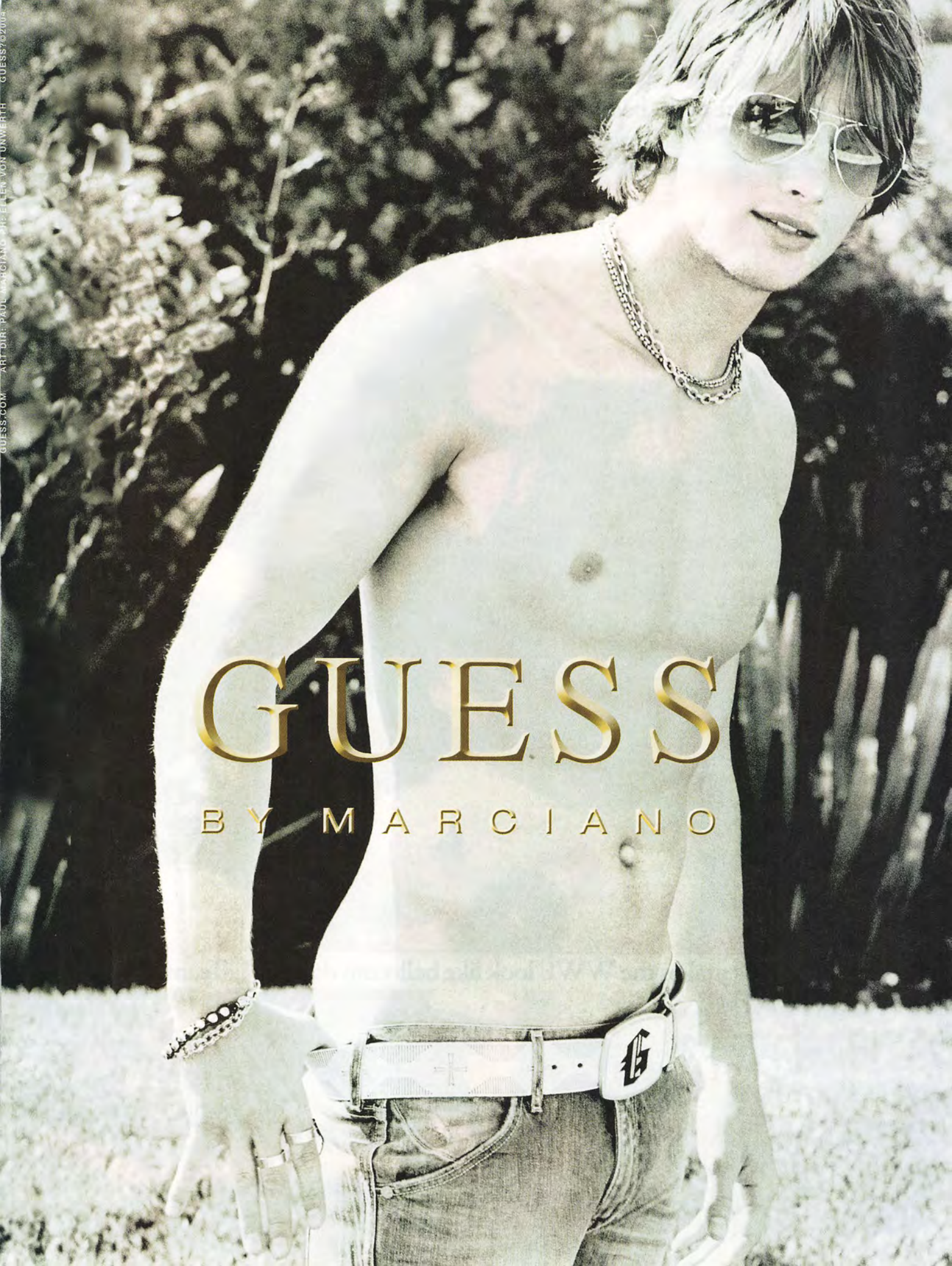
Blink-182 started out with no money, no deal, no obvious talent — just three pranksters with a big brown van called the Cock. Who woulda guessed the smarmy love ballad "All the Small Things" could propel them to superstardom?

68 ASK BLENDER

We answer your questions about the muse-like qualities of Rosanna Arquette, whether Frank Sinatra really wanted to beat the crap out of George Michael and, of course, blow-bearing dwarves

188 WHO DOES CHINGY THINK HE IS?

St. Louis' blinged-out baby pimp explains which too-small body part he'd most like to change.



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GUESS

BY MARCIANO

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"This makes the WWE look like ballroom dancing" - TeamXbox

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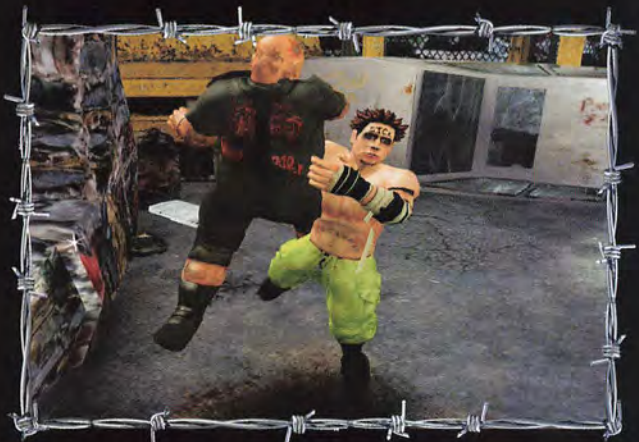
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PlayStation 2

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CONTENTS DECEMBER 2004

THE GUIDE ▶

132

U2'S NEW ALBUM IS A *TOUR DE FORCE*.

132 NEW RELEASES

U2, Snoop Dogg, Elton John, Ludacris, Nas, Simple Plan, A Perfect Circle and more!

156 CHART

158 MY MUSIC

What's the best music for drowning out the sounds of shrieking? According to comedian Michael Ian Black, it's Wilco. Thanks for the tip!

160 REISSUES

Pavement, Michael Jackson, Juvenile, John Lennon, Depeche Mode, Wu-Tang Clan and more!

170 LIVE!

Prince, Rilo Kiley

172 MOVIES

180 DVDS

182 BOOKS

186 GAMES

187 CROSSWORD

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You've Got Mail

WE WANT YOU TO SHARE...



NO POLITICS HERE!

Thank you for being a true music magazine! I'm so tired of *Rolling Stone* and their political stories and agenda. Your magazine is the best out there because it only reports on what I subscribed to it for, and that is *music*! Thank you, *Blender*, for not getting caught up in politics, and keep the music news coming.

CARRIE FUCHSEN, DES MOINES, IA

TERRIBLY SAD

I was surprisingly moved when I heard about Laura Branigan's death, but your tribute to her hit "Gloria" with the spine lyrics on your November issue ("I think they got your number") made me feel better. Thanks, *Blender*!

VICKI NASH, AUSTIN, TX

DEPRESSING

Thanks for the Elliott Smith lyrics on the last page of *Blender* ("There's nothing wrong that wasn't wrong before") from his song "No Name No. 5." A year after his death, Elliott Smith is still sorely missed. Thank you for reminding me to go put his record on.

ANNIE ELTON, BRIDGEPORT, CT

DUFF DENIED

Lead singer of Good Charlotte Joel Madden ("Growing Pains," Nov. '04) denies that he's been dating Hilary Duff, saying she's "not too interested in punk." Funny, that seems to be something they have in common.

JANET DANSBY, SAN ANTONIO, TX

CAMPAIGN OF HATE

Why do you guys hate mullets so much?

ANIKI RUTTENBERG, WEST BEND, WI

Officially the scariest letter we've received all year.

★ Congratulations to Mick Kelly of West Babylon, NY, the winner of *Blender's* October Crossword contest, who walks away with a bitchin' Paradigm home-theater system.

LISTEN UP!

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WIN ME!

U2's new Jacuzzi went up to 11.



PROBABLY NOT TRUE

I'm writing regarding the so-called "theft" of the "master" CD of U2's *How To Dismantle An Atomic Bomb* from their photo shoot in France ("Walk On Water," Nov. '04). Imagine my horror when I returned home to discover that some idiot had "swapped" my copy of *Monster Crunk Hitz Volume IV* for Bono's album of past-its-prime, hoary rock garbage. The following day, I rushed back to the photo studio in the desperate hope of relocating my favorite album of booty jams only to find that the Edge had long since disappeared with my precious CD. I just want to let the band know that if they return it to me in the mail, we'll say no more about it.

JONATHAN SMITH, VIA E-MAIL

HAR HAR

Sorry you didn't get to go sea chumming with Vanessa Carlton as you planned (\$848, Nov. '04) but at least by going to a strip club in SF, you got to hang out with semen after all.

ALI BROCK, INGLEWOOD, CA

SEX! POLITICS! RELIGION!

In true *Blender* fashion, you seem to have hit all three of the topics you aren't supposed to talk about with your Vanessa Carlton \$848: sex, politics and religion. Way to go, *Blender*!

ROSANNA KAHAN, HONESDALE, PA

ANOTHER LIFE-LONG FAN!

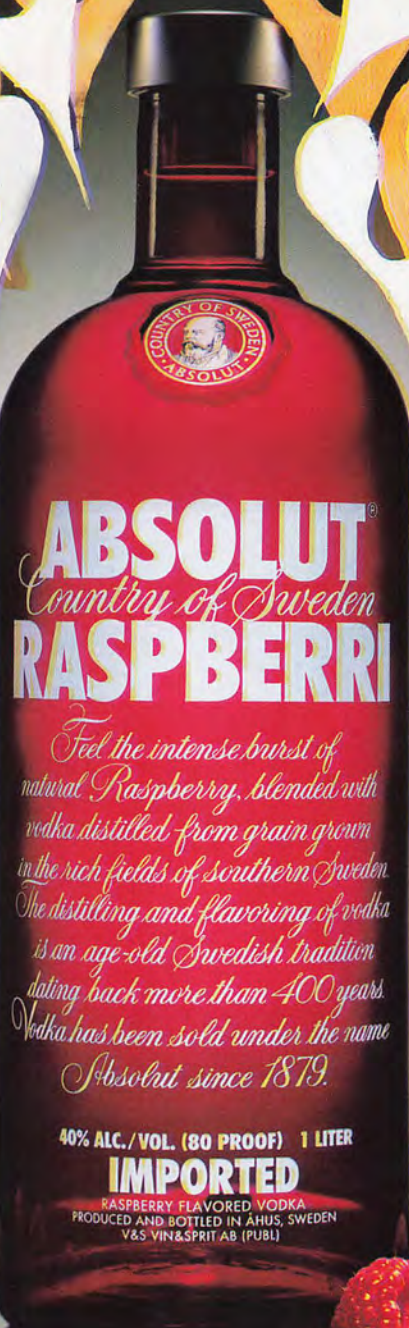
I am no longer a *Blender* virgin! After skimming countless magazines in the store, I picked up yours. Your staff should be commended on the pop-culture they provide to your readers. A lot of entertainment magazines could learn plenty from you. You keep me up to speed on music, movies and more. Pat yourselves on the back, you've just recruited a lifelong fan!

BRYAN MCFARLAND, MARTVILLE, NY

THIS IS ILLEGAL

I've read a lot of stolen magazines that my brother hooks me up with, and I was so impressed with yours that I'm going to make sure he steals *Blender* every month.

A.P., SAN DIEGO, CA →



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"Yes! I win the Juliette Lewis Olympics. Again!"

SCIENTOLOGY... NOT CRAZY

Wow. I had Juliette Lewis all wrong! Thanks for interviewing the bright, independent, together woman ("Blender Q&A," Nov. '04). She's not off her rocker like I thought she was. She even makes Scientology sound less crazy!

JIM ROTH, LOS ANGELES, CA

SO GAY

I really enjoyed your "25 Gayest Moments In Rock & Roll" (Nov. '04). At least I was enjoying it until I realized you never mentioned the late great Divine, the greatest gay rock & roller of all time! How can you look at yourselves in the mirror?

SOREN SOLSMAN, BROKEN BOW, NE

Not only can we look at ourselves in the mirror, we also look fabulous!

ALL-STAR BEAT-DOWN

Am I the only one who thinks that it's a pity you didn't publish your "How to Take a Punch" piece (Useful Tips from the Stars, Nov. '04) before Jack White beat the shit out of that guy from the Von Bondies?

AMANDA McLEAN, SUSSEX, NJ

★ LETTERS

SUPERFAN

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Brianne Newton and Alex Kapranos



Joan Jett and Mier Derringer



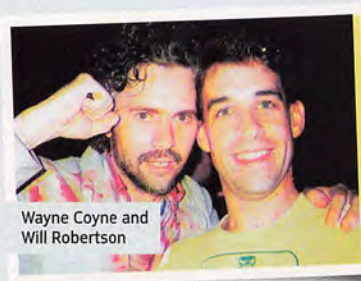
Elvis Costello and Skarah Hill



Frank Black and Donald Kraus



Coleen Brosnahan and Deryck Whibley



Wayne Coyne and Will Robertson



★ HEY LUNATIC MUSIC FAN! Send us shots of you with your favorite star – if we like what you take, we'll print it, and you'll get a Philips Digital Camera Key Ring like the one to the left. Send us your pics, and please include your name, address and a phone number where we can reach you.

BOOBLESS GIRLS

I can't take it any more, the stress, the pressure, the sleepless nights, those cold, judging eyes. Yep, if I have to sit through one more night of Olympic gymnastics and little boobless girls doing quadruple "kerchunkos" or whatever I'm going to poke my eyes out. Thank God my Blender came today. That Durst "feel too much with my soul," quote on p. 46? Now that's gold-medal, primetime, comic entertainment. That made me laugh harder

than when the Chinese gymnast face-planted off the uneven bars last night. And I laughed pretty hard at that.

PAM SCHUTTY, ATLANTA, GA

CELEBRITY IS WEIRD

Thanks for those pictures of Britney's boyfriend playing golf (Burner, Nov. '04). What's next? Christina Aguilera's nephew shooting hoops? Beyoncé's second cousin at his driving test?

STEPHEN DUNST, BROOKLYN, NY

Hey, no one likes a sarcastic bastard. Except us. →



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OZZY OSBOURNE THE POP STAR



26... "Now I'm living out here on the beach but these seagulls are still out of reach"

ELEPHANT FOR PRESIDENT

After reading your "Great American Rock-Off" piece I couldn't help wondering why Wayne Coyne didn't run for President himself (Nov. '04). I'd rather have voted for him than Bush or Kerry. In fact, I'd rather have voted for the guy in the elephant outfit.

SHEILA BRASHKOFF, SANTA MONICA, CA

HUNTERS ARE PEOPLE, TOO

Kudos, *Blender*, for representing both sides of the political spectrum in your "Great American Rock-Off." While I know you music types tend to run toward the liberal, I do appreciate you giving the Nuge (and a more conservative stance) equal billing.

TOM MADIGAN, NYACK, NY

A TON OF POO

I don't know why people have made such a huge fuss about the Dave Matthews Band supposedly dropping all that shit over a bridge (Burner, Nov. '04). He's been sending shit to record stores for years.

PAUL VERDONE, WINCHESTER, MD

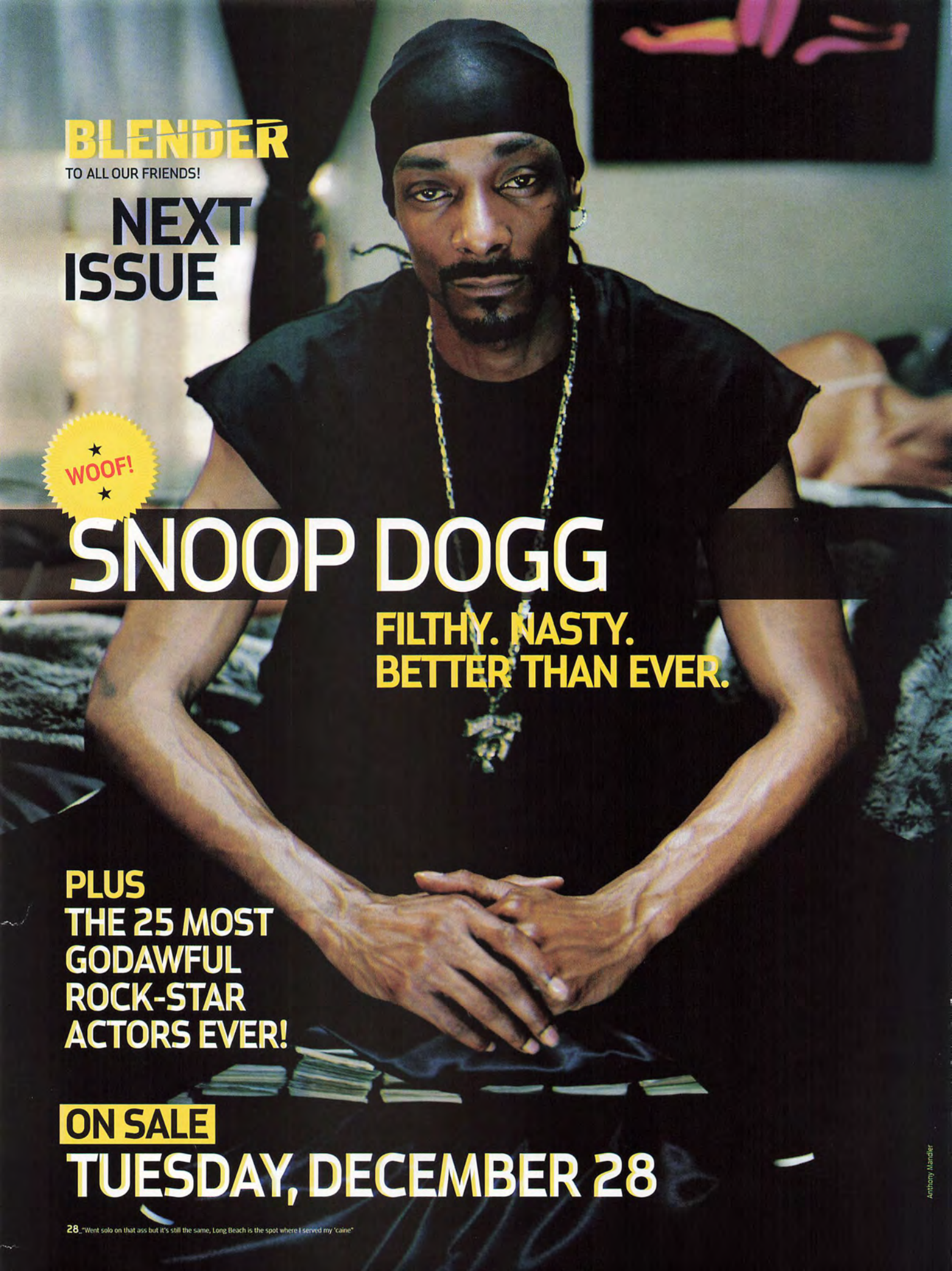


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ON SALE

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 28

28...Went solo on that ass but it's still the same, Long Beach is the spot where I served my 'caine"

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2- Domestic: Dwayne "Big Daddy" Gutridge 8.05 @ 181 MPH on 11/23/03. Import: Paul Efantis 8.25 @ 170.9 MPH on 10/05/03.

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ALL THE MUSIC. ALL THE NEWS. ALL THE TIME

BURNER

★ POP-STAR TERRORISTS? ★ ELTON ♥ OZZY ★ PARIS TAKES A TOKE

TEE'D OFF!

Britney sends messages to fans, critics with sexy T-shirts

★ BRITNEY SPEARS HAS found a provocative new way to express herself: sexually charged T-shirts.

The shirts feature messages such as "M.I.L.F. In Training" and "I'm a Virgin (but this is an old T-shirt)." The popstar-on-hiatus has also been seen sporting a baseball hat that says, "Shut Up and Do Me."

Newlywed Spears may be grappling with her identity as she shifts her career, assuming the role of wife and stepmother. "She's creating a new hybrid concept," says Dr. Susan B. Kaiser, Professor of Gender Studies and Fashion at the University of California, Davis. "She's showing us she's married but still sexy."

Spears, 22, started to wear the slogan T-shirts in May, soon after her courtship with Kevin Federline, 26, began. "When people are going through a change in identity, there's a change in appearance," Kaiser adds. "Obviously, she knows she's being photographed and she's determined to manage her image."

Though Federline's attire has seen little change from his uniform of undershirt, oversized pants and unlaced basketball shoes, he was photographed in September wearing a cap that said "Rock Out With Your Cock Out!" LAUREN HARRIS

Me like words!



JULY 24



AUGUST 29



SEPTEMBER 6



SEPTEMBER 9



SEPTEMBER 28



SEPTEMBER 29



["SHE'S SHOWING US SHE'S MARRIED BUT STILL SEXY."

HIGH ON LIFE!

Socialite-model-author-pop-star **Paris Hilton** enjoys nature's spoils off the California coast. Duuude!



Hilton spends Labor Day at a Malibu Beach house with friends.



She simultaneously talks on the phone and smokes something...



... before taking a walk on the beach and playing in the waves.

NEWS ROUNDUP

LATOYA JACKSON says she regrets claiming in 1993 that her brother Michael would spend days on end in his room with young boys. She says that "somebody else... made me do something against my will."

The Stellar Gospel Awards committee has pulled **KANYE WEST's** *The College Dropout* nomination. Upon closer inspection of the CD, the committee decided some songs contain "explicit lyrics."

Recently, when going through customs in Taiwan, **ELTON JOHN** shouted "Rude vile pigs!" to the throng of photographers surrounding him. "Do you know what that means? That's what all of you are." He later apologized.

WORD!



"I wouldn't trade this gift of being a Backstreet Boy for anything in the world."

HOWIE DOROUGH
ON FAME

Singer n.A.T.o has inspired widespread outrage in Russia.



Yikes!

Moscow producer replaces faux lesbians with faux suicide bomber

★ **THE MOSCOW IMPRESARIO** Ivan Shapovalov, who made his mark producing lesbian schoolgirl duo t.A.T.u., has turned his attentions to n.A.T.o, a 16-year-old female singer whose style resembles that of a Chechen suicide bomber.

"The message of the music is love," Shapovalov, 39, tells *Blender*. N.A.T.o, née Natasha

Shevlyakova, wears a black burqa — traditional garb for some Muslim women, and also the uniform of female terrorists known as Black Widows, who have been waging war on Russians for the past two years.

In the video for n.A.T.o's single "Chor Jaon," released in September, the words "Al-Qaeda," "Iraq," "oil" and "Bush" flash over images of the Middle East.

The lyrics, Shapovalov says, are inspired by Eastern poetry. "I'm not leading a campaign," he insists, dismissing the inference that

n.A.T.o is making a political statement. "I like her songs, and if people are scared by a woman wearing a black headscarf, that means they are sick themselves."

In a country where a nightclub named Auschwitz saw success, some still say n.A.T.o has crossed the line. Russian media have condemned her material and her timing. The Beslan school massacre, a tragedy involving the Black Widows in which hundreds were killed, occurred a week before her debut.

Though ultimately cancelled, her first concert — the tickets for which looked like airplane boarding passes — was scheduled for Sept. 11. "Any time is a good time to listen to music," Shapovalov counters.

Shapovalov, a former advertising executive and psychologist, is organizing a n.A.T.o performance in London. "Nothing is getting blown up there," he says. **VALERIE STIVERS**



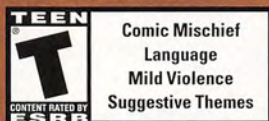
Ivan Shapovalov with t.A.T.u.

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THE NEXT BIG THING!

Regina Spektor

A Moscow-born piano-playing whiz kid with the Strokes in her corner

BY PAULINE O'CONNOR

BEFORE SETTLING INTO a Tribeca café, Regina Spektor has one request: Can she switch chairs with *Blender*? "I feel really weird if I don't get the window seat," she explains. "When I lived in Paris, I got in the habit of hanging out in cafés and watching people walk by."

The gimlet-eyed Spektor has seen a lot in her 24 years. Born in Moscow, she moved with her parents to the Bronx when she was 9. "We came for religious and political freedom. Russia was a very unpleasant place to be Jewish."

In Russia, Spektor's father had been a scientist and her mother a music professor, but both had to take menial jobs to make ends meet in America. Spektor, too, picked up work wherever she could: turning pages for concert musicians, farming butterflies and working at a detective agency, about which she is KGB-cryptic: "It's classified."

All this outsidership would feed her oddball musical style — a weirdly ancient-sounding mash-up of pre-rock and art-school piano delivered in a voice that swoops from whisper to moan and back again. "My songs take elements of classical music and literature," says the bookish Spektor, who finished college in three years, "and mix them with an 'I can do whatever I want' punk-rock attitude."

Her Björk-meets-Pushkin act eventually attracted Strokes frontman Julian Casablancas, who, after hearing the demo that would become her major-label debut, *Soviet Kitsch*, was so taken he invited her to tour with his band. Though much ado has been made of their relationship, Spektor denies a romantic involvement. "Julian took me under his wing like family, all the Strokes did," she says. "He's taught me so much about this business."

Two months on tour with the kings of New York was enlightening — and grueling. "It almost broke me," she says. "I am not a rock & roll band — that's not me." She shrugs. "I want to be playing in cafés when I'm 80." [BLENDER]

» OUT NOW SOVIET KITSCH SIRE



BJÖRK-MEETS-PUSHKIN EAST-VILLAGE WEIRDNESS

ALL ABOUT ME!

FAVORITE BOOK

The Master and Margarita, by Mikhail Bulgakov

RECOMMENDED ACTIVITY WHILE LISTENING

Playing in a sandbox

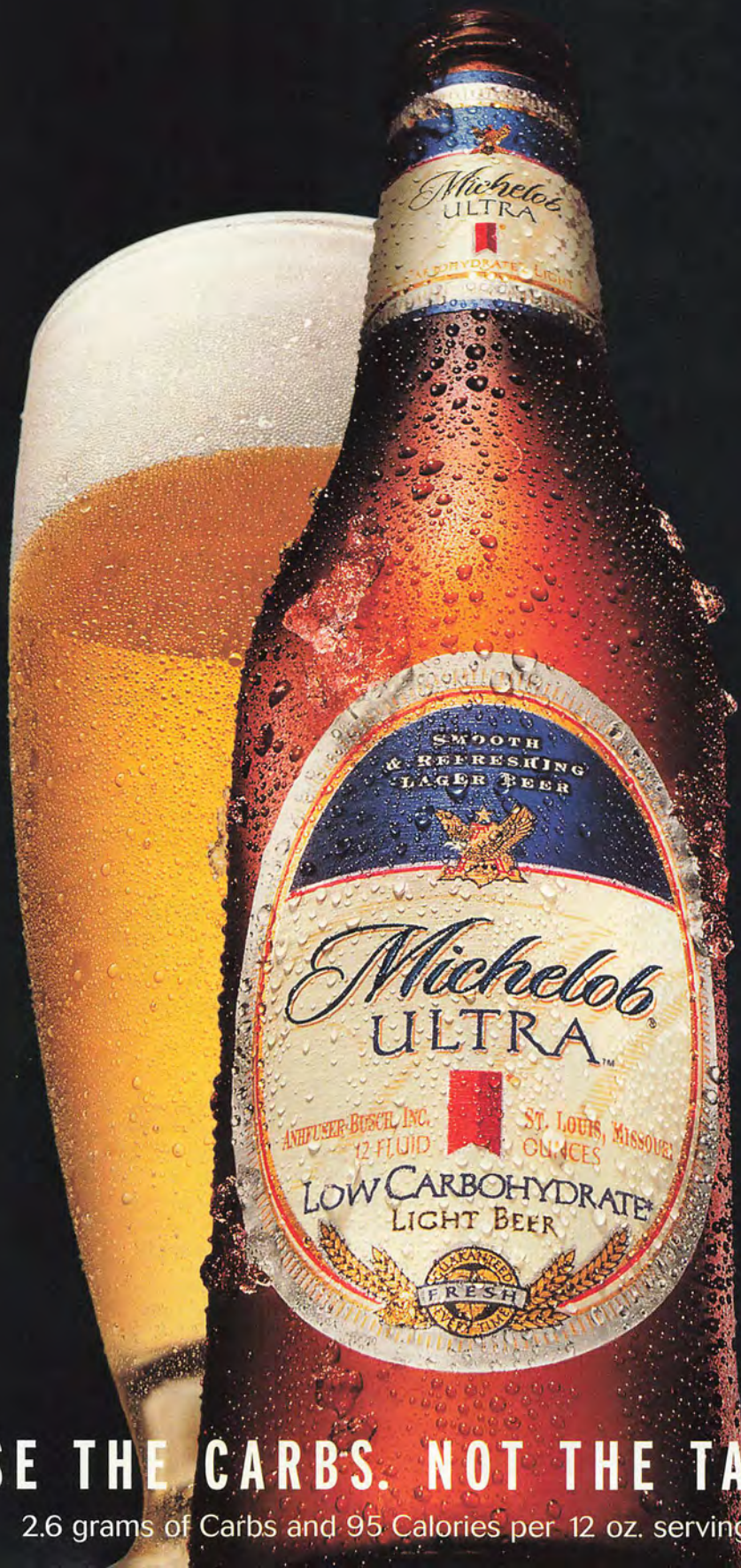
MOST DIVA-LIKE DEMAND

A bottle of Jack and a working keyboard

LEAST FAVORITE COMPARISON

Tori Amos

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POP STAR MUST-HAVE

RONALD
McDONALDProjecting a "just folks" persona
is a megastar essential

JESSICA SIMPSON



ENRIQUE IGLESIAS



CLAY AIKEN



DESTINY'S CHILD

NEWS
ROUNDUP

FRANZ FERDINAND have banned groupies from the band's after-show parties. "I see it as a form of abuse that I find absolutely repellent," singer **ALEX KAPRANOS** said.

WHITNEY HOUSTON is said to have been acting strange at rehearsals for the World Music Awards in Las Vegas. While she sang "I Will Always Love You," she allegedly stopped to point at people in the audience and order them to pick up garbage.

JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE is allowing his likeness to be used for a new bad-boy videogame character called "the Hustler" for Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2005.

WORD!



"They're making me out to be a serial marrying person. I'm laughing at that."

THRICE-MARRIED JENNIFER LOPEZ, WHO IS 35



WHERE'S COURTNEY?

Courtney Love: Not doing anything that will get her arrested or thrown in the loonie bin.

Weird!

Lately, the stressed-out grunge queen has been acting . . . normal

★ **BAD NEWS FOR Court TV fans:** Courtney Love has been acting a lot less crazy lately.

Currently undergoing outpatient treatment at a drug-rehabilitation clinic, she has gained some weight and is keeping a low profile while she preps her band the Chelsea for a fall tour.

Despite her lingering legal and financial woes, Love has taken steps toward sobriety and health. She's reportedly attending AA meetings, submitting to court-ordered drug

tests, and has become a regular at her gym's rock & roll spin class.

After a chaotic summer, during which she was hospitalized at New York's Bellevue Hospital, Love awaits trial on two assault charges, and is being sued by a California travel agency for over \$50,000 in unpaid expenses.

On October 7, Love was a guest DJ on L.A.'s Indie 103.1 radio station, and played some of her favorite songs, including the Verve's "The Drugs Don't Work." **JOSH EELLS**

POO POO P'JOOB

A diaper bag, in memory of
John Lennon

THANKS TO YOKO Ono's entrepreneurial spirit, parents worldwide can carry their baby's Huggies in a diaper bag designed by John Lennon.

The diaper satchel is a part of the John Lennon "Real Love" collection, a set of baby accessories and toys whose cuddly animal motifs — featuring giraffes, rhinos, elephants and kangaroos, but no walruses — are based on drawings the late Beatle made for his son Sean.



Baby not included.

This fall, Ono introduced the John Lennon Peace Chuck Taylor sneaker line, featuring a Lennon self-portrait and the lyrics to "Imagine." **JOSH EELLS**



VS.

VS.

VS.

VS.

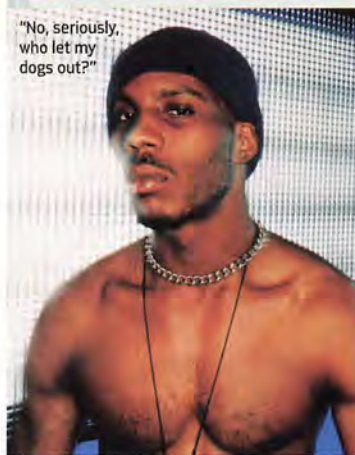
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WHEN WILL YOUR FAVORITE POP STAR CROAK?

"No, seriously, who let my dogs out?"



#14 DMX

CURRENT AGE	33
AVERAGE AMERICAN'S LIFE EXPECTANCY	79

CATEGORY YEARS ADDED/SUBTRACTED

He's African American (which lowers life expectancy) ... -6

... but he's married with children (which raises it) +5

Finds companionship in dogs ... +2

... but he was charged with animal cruelty -1

Possible aggressive behavior: He's been accused of stabbing, attempted robbery, rape and assault -4

He's been charged with illegal weapons and ammo possession and DUI -6

Writes hits and stars in films between court dates (efficient use of time) +4

Helps others via community service ... +2

... But it was court-ordered -1

Heavy smoker (weed and cigarettes) and hangs with heavy smokers -8

Writes autobiography (soul-searching introspection) +4

ESTIMATED LIFE EXPECTANCY 70

PROJECTED YEAR OF DEATH 2032

Gerontologist Dr. Demko says: "Expect survivor-workaholic DMX to keep his self-promotion money machine — music, dog-clothes — operating in high gear."

NEWS ROUNDUP

After months of deliberation, **ANDRÉ 3000** has chosen his first major film role. He'll star in the latest from **MADONNA**'s husband **GUY RITCHIE**, the man behind recent turkey, *Swept Away*.

San Francisco's alt-rock radio station Live 105 added a "mash-up" category to its playlist. Now in rotation are **RADIOHEAD** vs. **JOHN LENNON** ("Karma Life"), **FRANZ FERNAND** vs. the **BEASTIE BOYS** ("Franzies Boys") and **LINKIN PARK** vs. **BRITNEY SPEARS** ("Faint Britney").

EMINEM's troubled ex-wife **KIM MATHERS** has been released from custody to start another drug-treatment program at a facility in Center City, Minnesota. She previously incurred extra jail time after dropping out of two other court-ordered programs.

WORD!



"I learned a lot from Jessica — what *not* to do." **ASHLEE SIMPSON**

Ville Valo of H.I.M., after selling the shirt off his back.



Bam Margera with his "heartagram" board.

Bam!

Thanks to a *Jackass* and Hot Topic, Finnish band storm U.S.

★ **HOW DOES A** no-name rock band from Finland land a contract with a bigtime U.S. label? By selling their T-shirts at the mall, of course.

A year ago, virtually no one in America had heard of H.I.M. But then the self-proclaimed "love-metal" group hit it off with Bam Margera on a European skateboarding tour, and soon the *Jackass* star was sporting a tattoo of the band's "heartagram" logo (a cross between a heart and a pentagram).

It wasn't long before Hot Topic, a trend-setting teen fashion chain with over 400 stores in malls nationwide, approached the band with an offer to license their merchandise. "We didn't expect anything special," H.I.M. singer Ville Valo admits.

Thanks to Margera's support, though, the heartagram T-shirts quickly became Hot Topic's most popular item. And as shirt sales grew, so did sales of H.I.M.'s 1999 album *Razorblade Romance*, rereleased in the U.S. in 2003. Now they've sold nearly 175,000 copies, with little help from radio or MTV.

Mostly they depend on fans like Emily, a 16-year-old from Bowie, Maryland. "I'm a Hot Topic band-T-shirt whore," she says. "I have at

least 10 of them, and two H.I.M. shirts. I think they're great!"

In fact, many younger bands, raised in an era of free downloads, have learned that merchandising is a more lucrative and reliable source of income than CD sales. "For lesser-known bands, their income is basically zero percent album sales and 100 percent merch sales," Bob McLynn, the manager of Chicago punk foursome Fall Out Boy, says. "Merch is how they survive."

Still, album sales can't hurt. Capitalizing on its sudden success, H.I.M. signed a four-album deal with Sire Records in September. They'll enter the studio in January to record their U.S. debut. **JOSHELLS**



Hot Topic, never far from Cinnabon.



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USEFUL TIPS FROM THE STARS!

HOW TO...

Fake Your Own Death

Why wait until you're six feet under to enjoy the respect and adulation you deserve?

Sum 41 shows you the way to eternal salvation... via Tahiti!

Sum 41, from left: Steve Jocz, Jay McCaslin, Deryck Whibley and Dave Baksh



BY STEVE KANDELL
PHOTOGRAPHY BY GEOFF MOORE

1 CHOOSE A WEAPON

JAY MCCASLIN, BASSIST: "Ask yourself, 'Which method of fake death is best for me?' Vanishing like Jim Morrison isn't interesting; best to go in a hail of bullets like Tupac or Biggie. Mouth off to people, so everyone knows you're wanted, then get your friends to shoot the shit out of your car so it looks like a drive-by."

2 SECURE EVIDENCE

DAVE BAKSH, GUITARIST: "To convince people you're dead, you're going to need a body. Find a homeless guy with the same blood type as you, offer to buy his arm for \$20, then put it in your car with your watch strapped to it. Or hit the Asian black market for a cadaver, then dress him up in your favorite T-shirt."

3 THINK IT THROUGH

STEVE JOCZ, DRUMMER: "Nothing will up the value of your life like your untimely demise. If you are an artist of any kind, make sure you have a big backlog of art, scribbles or music waiting to be discovered. But faking your own death will also work if you're just in need of some attention."

4 GO ON THE LAM

DERYCK WHIBLEY, SINGER-GUITARIST: "Set up a Swiss bank account or maybe something in the Cayman Islands so you still have financial resources in the afterlife. Then head on down to Tahiti and kick back while your ex-girlfriends mourn you and suckers line up to buy whatever crap you've left behind."

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in an all-out World Destruction Tour!



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TEEN



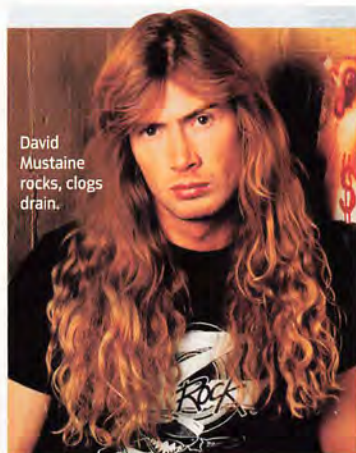
Blood
Crude Humor
Language
Suggestive Themes
Use of Alcohol
Violence

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David Mustaine rocks, clogs drain.

DO YOU ROCK?

DAVE MUSTAINE

Does Megadeth's main man indeed... rawk?

Ever trash a hotel room?

In Japan, I flushed the toilet in [ex-bassist] Dave Ellefson's room with my foot and the pipe broke off the back of it. Ellefson and his roommate were swimming all night.

Best rumor about yourself?

That I was dead. My mom and my girlfriend at the time heard it on the radio and freaked out.

Biggest celeb's home you've gotten drunk in?

Vince Neil's.

Worst rock & roll injury?

I got hit in the mouth with a combat boot in Poland and chipped my teeth pretty bad.

Biggest celeb on speed dial?

[NHL hockey player] Ossi Vaananen from the Colorado Avalanche.

Worst tour horror story?

In 1988, we were supposed to play six or seven stadium gigs with Iron Maiden, but the tour got canceled [due to heroin problems in the band].

Ever been declared legally dead?

Not officially, but I did flatline once.

Most expensive piece of clothing?

Custom leather pants for \$5,000.

Most decadent thing you've ever done?

Once in Miami, I did five girls before I went onstage, including a mother-daughter team. DAVE HILL



VERDICT

FLATLINING AND DOING A MOTHER-DAUGHTER TEAM? DAVE MUSTAINE ROCKS SO HARD IT'S SCARY!

→ MEGADETH'S 10TH STUDIO ALBUM, *THE SYSTEM HAS FAILED* (SANCTUARY), IS OUT NOW.

NEWS ROUNDUP

MICHAEL JACKSON has admitted to paying \$2 million to a child and his family who had accused the singer of abuse in 1990. "I settled with certain individuals because I was concerned about my family and the media scrutiny," he said.

JOHNNY CASH's custom-made abalone-inlaid acoustic guitar was recently sold at auction in New York for \$131,200.

SHYNE has shot back at prison authorities after his phone rights were revoked for allegedly organizing a press campaign from behind bars. "The Shyne movement will not be censored," he said.

WORD!



"This is really low-rent this time. The whole affair seems somewhat pathetic."

CHRISTINA ON BRITNEY'S SECOND WEDDING



Acrassicauda brace themselves for alien abduction.



Jamming in an office space.

I-Rawk!

Iraq's only metal band finds no liberation after Operation: Freedom

★ IRAQ'S ONLY KNOWN heavy-metal band, Acrassicauda, which persevered through a dictatorship that banned Western music, now has nowhere to play.

The Metallica-inspired group, fronted by 21-year-old Faisal Talal, has been black-listed from Baghdad venues for allegedly inciting audiences to headbang and slam-dance.

"It's never been harder for us to play our music," Talal said of the climate following the overthrow of Saddam Hussein. "There's a lot to be angry about, and we want to give people a way to get that out."

Acrassicauda (the Latin name of a species of Scorpion), struggled for recognition before the war, but avoided arrest and censure when they wrote the seemingly pro-Hussein but secretly rebellious song "Youth of Iraq."

The band met in high school and learned their stage moves watching bootleg tapes of Megadeth and Slayer.

It's currently unknown how many of the band remain in Iraq. Founding member Walid Rabiaa quit, and it is rumored that the rest of the band has fled to Jordan after receiving threats from Islamist extremists. CHUCK MINDENHALL

"IT'S NEVER BEEN HARDER TO PLAY OUR MUSIC."

WEIRD BAND ALERT!

EXTREME ELVIS

A pissing, naked Elvis impersonator

"EXTREME"?

Yes. Elvis didn't piss on an American flag. "I am rescuing him from irrelevance," says Matt Armstrong, 38, a San Francisco barista.

HOW DID THIS RESCUE START?

After four days in the desert for Burning Man, someone noticed "Hershey stains" on his pants. It was a Eureka moment. "I thought, 'That's an angle!'" he says.

A CONTROVERSIAL ANGLE?

Despite cease-and-desist orders from Elvis Presley's estate, Armstrong insists audiences love the show: "I've had people put my dick directly in their mouth!" DAVE HILL



Giddy up, little person!

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THE NEXT BIG THING!

ALL ABOUT US!

OBSESSIONS?

IAN CATSKILKIN: "Crosswords in trashy newspapers."

FAVORITE SONG RIGHT NOW?

EDDIE ARGOS: "Always" by Half Japanese

WON'T TOUR WITHOUT . . .

FREDDIE FEEDBACK: Eyeliner and a good book.

TYPICAL NIGHT OF DEBAUCHERY?

CHRIS CHINCHILLA: Booze, dancing, telling Eddie, "No you can't do that."

IT'S ALL CHOPPY GUITARS AND ENTHUSIASM.

Art Brut, from left:
Chris Chinchilla, Ian
Catskilkin, Freddie
Feedback, Mike and
Eddie Argos

Art Brut

From England, the best unsigned band in the world!

BY NICK DUERDEN

IT'S MONDAY LUNCHTIME in London, and Eddie Argos, lead singer of Art Brut, is on his way to work. For the past two years, he has been a social worker for learning-disabled adults. It doesn't pay well, but he can't afford to quit.

"Art Brut has only been together 12 months," he says, "and we don't have a record deal at the moment. We've got no money!"

Earlier this year, the London-based five-piece — Argos, guitarists Chris Chinchilla and Ian Catskilkin, bassist Freddie Feedback and a German drummer called, simply, Mike —

released their debut single "Formed a Band," a cartwheeling punk song in which the singer proclaims: "Formed a band, we formed a band! Look at us, we formed a band!" It's a giddy instant classic, despite Argos's genuine inability to sing in key — any key.

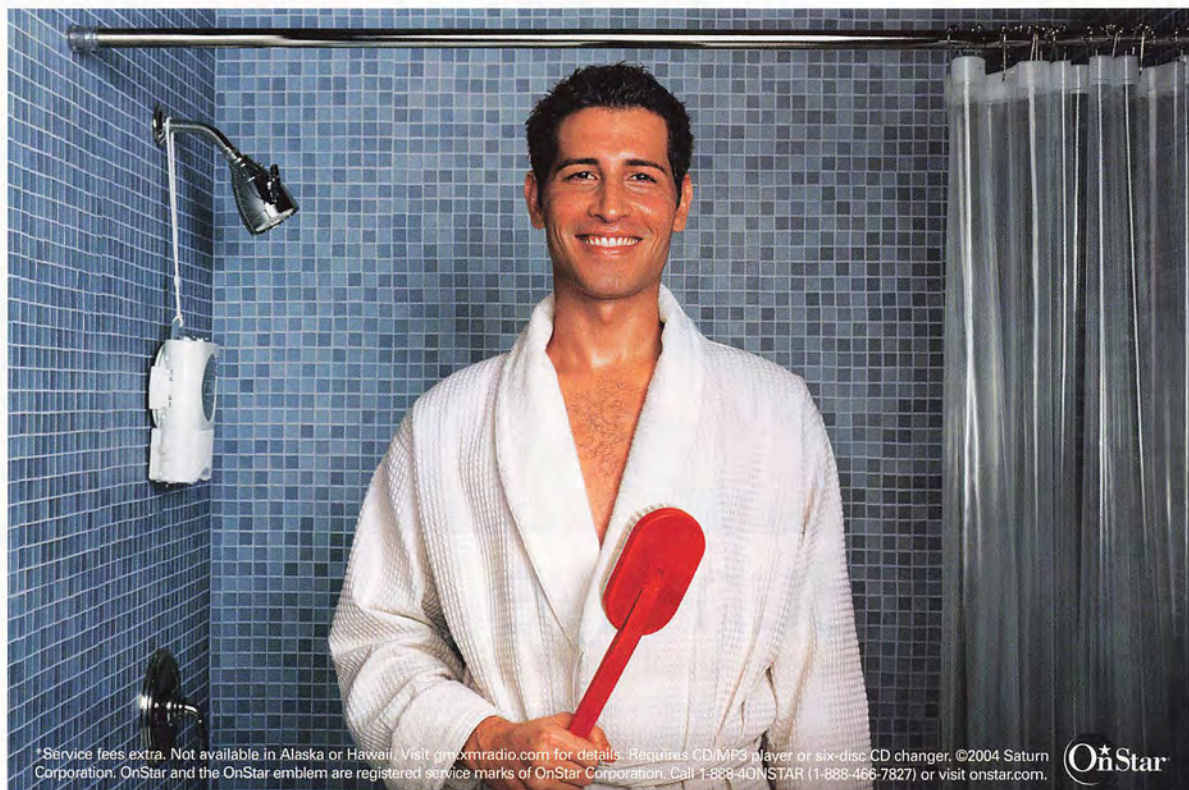
Dyspraxia, a learning disability affecting speech, is to blame, says Argos. "I try to make up for it by writing good lyrics. Not being able to sing never stopped Bob Dylan or Lou Reed."

While the band record their debut and search for a label to put it out, they've posted

bootlegs of their songs at Art-brut.co.uk. All choppy guitars, yelping vocals and brazen enthusiasm, the tracks have provoked comparisons to Franz Ferdinand ("I think it's because I wear a suit," Argos says), and have made their way into New York dance parties. "I love the attention!" Suddenly, he looks mournful. "If only we could scrape together enough money," he says, "we'd be over there like a shot." [BLENDER]

>> OUT NOW "FORMED A BAND" SINGLE ROUGH TRADE

The Man Who Could Not Sing



The Six-Speaker Saturn ION Quad Coupe



People first.





TOP 7 HOLIDAY GIFTS.

1. Bottle of Jack Daniel's.
2. Bottle of Jack Daniel's with a bow on it.
3. Bottle of Jack Daniel's wrapped up.
4. Bottle of Jack Daniel's with some mistletoe.
5. Bottle of Jack Daniel's and one of those shaky snow things.
6. Bottle of Jack Daniel's and a carton of egg nog.
7. And a bottle of Jack Daniel's in a pear tree.



Please drink responsibly.
Come visit us at www.jackdaniels.com

Stevens arriving back in London after being deported.



Buh-bye

The U.S. government deports Cat Stevens. But why?

★ IT WAS BY any definition a bizarre scene: former singer-songwriter Cat Stevens, in his bearded, post-'70s, Muslim incarnation, being grabbed in Maine by federal officials off a diverted Washington, D.C.-bound flight, then deported.

On September 21, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) announced that Stevens, now known as Yusuf Islam, was on a government "no fly" list and had only mistakenly been permitted to board in London. Islam accused the U.S. government of "unjust profiling" and threatened legal action.

But DHS officials maintain they received intelligence indicating that in the last four months, Islam may have been involved in activities that support terrorism or could be supporting terrorism. Officials say they have concerns about people Islam met with at his home in Dubai last summer, which the DHS says justifies his deportation, though not arrest.

In the '80s and '90s, Islam kept close relations with extreme elements in the U.K., and

appeared to support the death-sentence fatwa against Salman Rushdie. More important are concerns about his charitable contributions. In 2000, Israel barred him from entering the country because, it charged, he had helped fund the terrorist group Hamas.

Islam says he thought his money was going to humanitarian aid for refugee camps and denies knowingly funding terrorism.

In the past few years, Islam has made 19 trips to the U.S. In fact, he visited the States as recently as May, when he met with members of the Bush administration, including Jim Towey, director of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. A White House spokesperson says they met "to talk about philanthropic work," but noted this was prior to Islam's placement on the no-fly list.

Islam — who in his folk-rock days landed 11 Top-40 songs, including touchstones "Moon Shadow" and "Peace Train" — has consistently portrayed himself as a moderate since 9/11, and has voiced his opposition to the terrorist acts. More recently, he condemned the murder of Russian school children by Chechen separatists. In an interview on ABC's 20/20 this September, Islam was asked if he had been involved in dealings that warranted his inclusion on the "no fly" list.

"Absolutely not," Islam said. "I'm just waiting to be told what I've, you know, supposed to have done. Then I can deal with it." JAKE TAPPER

TERROR LEVEL

ROCK STAR!

SEVERE

HIGH

ELEVATED

GUARDED

LOW

NABBED!

Singer arrested for switchblade

INCUBUS SINGER BRANDON Boyd, 28, was arrested October 6 at New York's LaGuardia Airport when he attempted to board an airplane with a switchblade. "I totally forgot it was in my bag, and when the security person pulled it out, I thought, 'Oh, no, my bad,'" Boyd says.





TENNESSEE MISTLETOE.



Be good for goodness' sake. Drink responsibly.

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SMITTEN!

Pop icons **Elton John** and **Ozzy Osbourne** share more than bizarre eyewear and unrealistic hair.



Elton John greets Ozzy and Sharon Osbourne at London's Royal Opera House for the *GQ* Men of the Year Awards in September.



Sharon disappears as the two old friends embrace.



Elton and Ozzy walk away, arm in arm.

Mmm, Elton Osbourne...

NEWS ROUNDUP

STROKES guitarist **ALBERT HAMMOND JR.** has said that the band might be away for five years recording their third album. "We have a lot of work to do," he said.

JERMAINE DUPRI has explained why his girlfriend **JANET JACKSON** permits him to go to strip clubs. "I go to have a good time, not to [mess] with the girls," he said.

Easy-listening legend **BURT BACHARACH** has called on **DR. DRE** for assistance on his upcoming record, though, he says, it will not be a hip-hop album.



IN THE STUDIO

"It's like Nelly!"

That's how the Beck describes his follow-up to the mopey *Sea Change*

★ "IT LOOKS LIKE an old Mississippi steamboat," Beck says of the L.A. studio called, fittingly, the Boat, where he's finishing his as-yet-untitled eighth album. "It's got a moat around it. I asked them to fill it with water, but they wouldn't because of flies."

OK, so Gen X's most famous absurdist didn't get a moat. This year, though, other more crucial wishes came true, which may explain the radical departure from the post-breakup melancholy of 2002's *Sea*

Change. In April, the 34-year-old Beck married actress (and fellow Scientologist) Marissa Ribisi, and last summer, their first child, Cosimo Henri, was born.

Reflecting his upbeat mood, he's enlisted the Dust Brothers, the production duo behind his two

funkiest albums to date (1996's Grammy-winning *Odelay* and 1999's *Midnite Vultures*). "After doing the last record, touring America three times, Europe a couple of times, I had to put the acoustic guitar away," he says.

Indicative of his renewed spirit, where the "the beats are the focus," he says, is "E-Pro," a single featuring his trademark non-sequitur raps laid over a "trashy" guitar riff. "It's like Nelly, but with a garage band."

Beck says he "really got back into [electric] guitar playing," and even invited Jack White to help record a song. But don't expect a star-studded album. "This is the first record since *Odelay* where I played most of the instruments myself," he says with a sigh. "And I've spent a lot of time trying to get it right." **JOSH EELLS**

ALL ABOUT MY ALBUM!

ARTIST
Beck

STUDIO
The Boat, Los Angeles

PRODUCED BY
The Dust Brothers, Tony Hoffer

LAST RECORD
Sea Change, 2002

NEW RECORD
Not yet titled, February 2005

WORD!



"I feel quite sexy and happy exactly how I am."

PLASTIC-SURGERY ENTHUSIAST
LIL' KIM

ALSO IN THE STUDIO

◀ **BRIGHT EYES** are finishing two CDs for a January 25 release date at Presto! Studios in Lincoln, Nebraska.

DISTURBED are at Groove-master Recording Studio in Chicago working on their follow-up to 2002's *Believe*, due March 2005.

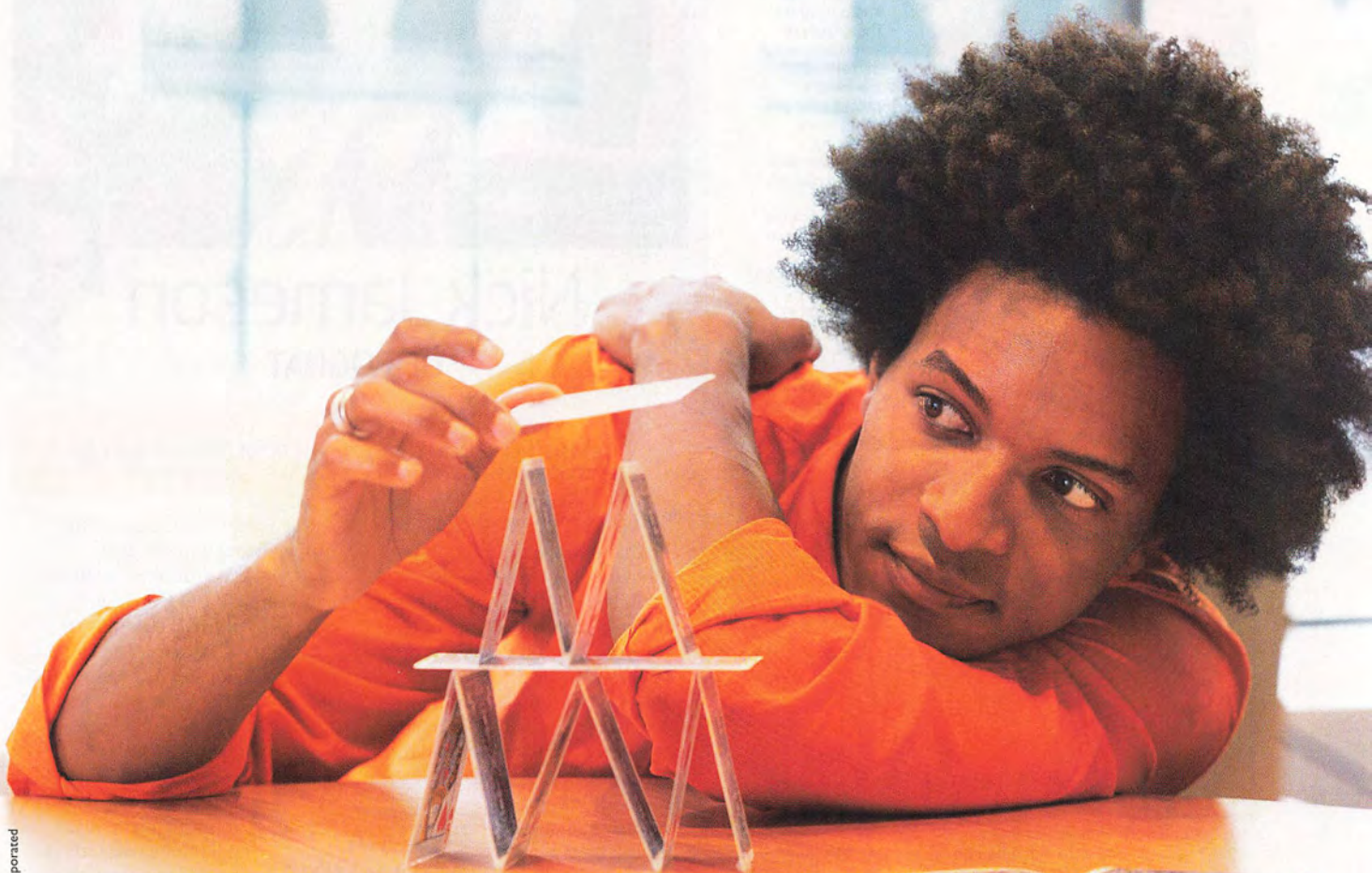
DEFTONES are in Connecticut with Bob Ezrin recording the follow-up to 2003's gold-selling self-titled album, due spring 2005.

THE MARS VOLTA are in New York's Avatar Studios finishing up *Frances the Mute*, their sophomore album, due February 2005.



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GOAL!

Rod Stewart launches soccer balls during a concert — and Paul Oakenfold's dad-in-law ends up in the hospital



1 Aug. 30, 2004: Superstar DJ Paul Oakenfold treats in-laws Vincenzo and Rita Costa to a Rod Stewart show at the Hollywood Bowl.



2 At the end of the show, soccer-fan Stewart kicks balls into the crowd, as is his tradition.



3 But one of the missiles strikes 61-year-old Vincenzo in the head, sending him into convulsions...



4 ... and to the hospital. Oakenfold tells Stewart to apologize or he'll sue. No lawsuit has been filed.

NEWS ROUNDUP

The **FCC** fined CBS \$550,000 for broadcasting **JANET JACKSON's** notorious Super Bowl XXXVIII nipple flash. The halftime show remains the most replayed moment in TiVo history.

DARKNESS singer **JUSTIN HAWKINS** has apologized for the quality of some new songs performed at the band's recent concerts. "They were appalling, really," he said. "Turgid rubbish."

After a surprise performance at **DAVE CHAPPELLE's** Brooklyn Block Party in September, **WYCLEF JEAN** fueled rumors of a **FUGEES** reunion, saying all members are now talking and generating "good vibes."

WORD!



"My boobs have been a trademark for me, but I've paid one hell of a price."

DOLLY PARTON

LIFE AFTER ROCK



FYI: Foghat styled themselves.

Nick Jameson OF FOGHAT



THEN

BASSIST, PRODUCER
1974-1976, 1981-1983

NOW

ACTOR, VOICEOVER ACTOR,
LOS ANGELES

★ "I STARTED WORKING with Foghat in the early '70s. We were all living in a house on Long Island, and one day [leader] Dave Peverett came over with a skeleton demo of 'Slow Ride.' We listened to it and went downstairs and jammed it right away. The bass parts, guitar parts, the 'slow ride, take it easy,' and the breakdown in the middle were improvised onto a cassette tape.

"After a while, it started to get old. There's a cliché that everything blends together on these tours, and it's true. After I left, I did several solo albums.

"I'd always been a dialect fanatic and a silly-voice fanatic. I made a voiceover demo tape, sent it to agencies in Atlanta, where I was living, and I immediately started getting work. It was such a shock to walk into a

studio for an hour, have some fun, walk out and get paid.

"I work in animated cartoons, commercials and I've done hundreds of interactive games. Versatility is my thing, so I get hired to do tons of different voices. On *The Critic*, with Jon Lovitz, I did between 20 and 30 voices a show.

"Voiceover led to acting and acting led to improv comedy. I got hooked and moved to L.A. in 1990 with this idiotic idea that I would make a living as an actor. But I was very lucky. I've done

guest spots on a lot of shows, such as *West Wing*, *The Practice*, *Drew Carey* and *King of Queens*.

"But the coolest thing I've ever done is my improv comedy band, the Flying Fannoli Brothers. It's a kick-ass band, but there's no way I'd join a 'band' band again. Been there, done that." **AS TOLD TO JON REGARDIE**

"I AM A SILLY-VOICE FANATIC."



WHAT'S IN YOUR BAG?



Mouse On Mars, on the street.

MOUSE ON MARS

Other Music, 15 E. 4th St., NYC



SUN RA ART FORMS OF DIMENSIONS TOMORROW

JAN ST. WERNER: "He's a free-jazz, black-music superhero. He conducted an orchestra, but it was really more like a tribe."



MOTÖRHEAD IRON FIST

ANDI TOMA: "This was one of the first bands who destroyed their monitor speakers to have a better sound — they are masters of destructive sound processing."



CHARLES IVES CONCORD SONATA

JAN ST. WERNER: "He kind of invented mixing. His composing was radical; the parts don't come together harmonically. He's a visionary."



SCHLAMM-PEITZGER EVERYTHING WITH- OUT ALL INCLUSIVE

ANDI TOMA: "Play this if you're on a boat trip in the Caribbean. There aren't any vocals — except for ones by insects. And they are very nice!"

→ MOUSE ON MARS'S NEW ALBUM, *RADICAL CONNECTOR* (THRILL Jockey), IS OUT NOW.

OBITS

RODNEY DANGERFIELD, 82, Oct. 5, in L.A., from heart-surgery complications. Bug-eyed comic who built a career on self-deprecating one-liners and helped launch the careers of Jerry Seinfeld and Jim Carrey. In the '80s, he won a Grammy for a comedy album, *No Respect*, and in 1983 wrote a hit rap parody "Rap-pin' Rodney."

SKEETER DAVIS, 72, Sept. 19, in Nashville, of cancer. Grand Ole Opry veteran who scored many country hits from the late '50s through the '70s. Born Mary Frances Penick, she married and divorced three times. Her last husband was NRBQ bassist Joey Spampinato.

RUSS MEYER, 82, Sept. 18, in L.A., of complications from pneumonia. B-movie auteur and nudie-film pioneer, whose kitsch-filled flicks of the '60s today stand as cult classics. The band Mudhoney took their name from Meyer's 1965 movie.

SCOTT MUNI, 74, Sept. 28, in NYC. Rock jock on the air in New York for almost 50 years. Muni, who had a stroke last January, interviewed almost every classic-rock superstar, from Jimmy Page and Mick Jagger to Bruce Springsteen and the Grateful Dead.

At the Hammersmith Odeon in London, 1980.



Johnny Ramone 1948–2004

Ramones guitarist died of cancer at his Hollywood home at age 55

★ ON SEPTEMBER 15, 2004, Johnny Ramone became the third of the four original Ramones to pass away. The guitarist's death from prostate cancer follows the deaths of bandmates Joey and Dee Dee Ramone, all within three years.

Born John Cummings, Johnny was arguably the most iconic Ramone. With his sheepdog hair,

low-slung Mosrite guitar, buckled legs and sneakered feet wide apart, he looked exactly like the Ramones sounded. But their cartoon-hoodlum image masked a band of fiercely pure ideals. In stripping the music back to its bare essentials, the Ramones birthed punk rock, and helped reenergize rock & roll in the process. Johnny's pumping down-stroke style has inspired garage-band guitarists the world over.

An outspoken political conservative, Johnny nevertheless bonded closely with Eddie Vedder, who was among the friends and family at the guitarist's deathbed.

Fans, meanwhile, might like to remember Johnny's remarks about the Ramones' farewell show in 1996: "I have been fortunate to have spent my entire musical career playing for Ramones fans, which I would like to believe are the most musically knowledgeable, coolest and best fans any group could have." PAUL DU NOYER





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20 SONGS YOU MUST DOWNLOAD THIS MONTH

- 1 Trick Daddy**
feat. Twista and Lil Jon
"Let's Go" SLIP-N-SLIDE/ATLANTIC
Ozzy's "Crazy Train" takes a detour through the dirty-dirty.



- 2 Gwen Stefani**
"What You Waiting For?" INTERSCOPE
Throbbing disco-pop from *Blender's* Woman of the Year.



- 3 Snoop Dogg feat. Pharrell**
"Drop It Like It's Hot" DOGGYSTYLE/GEFFEN
Snoop's hypnotic brags lace a Neptunes lullaby of bass thumps and mouth-clicking.



- 4 Jay-Z and R. Kelly**
"The Return" DEF JAM/JIVE
The pied piper of R&B lures Hov out of retirement for this old-school homage.



- 5 Death From Above 1979**
"Turn It Out" VICE
Drummer and guitarist crank out perfect driving music for a demolition derby.



- 6 Bowling for Soup**
"Almost" JIVE
Texas punk goofballs lament failed high school dreams, failed love and... failed burglary attempts?



- 7 Yung Wun**
feat. DMX, Lil' Flip and David Banner
"Tear it Up" J RECORDS
Over a rowdy marching band loop, this ATL rookie raps like he's being strangled.



- 8 The Thrills**
"Whatever Happened to Corey Haim?" VIRGIN
Orchestral pop about sex and revolving-door celebrity — it's like *The Surreal Life* gone alt-rock.



- 9 William Shatner**
"Common People" SHOUT! FACTORY
Pulp's Britpop anthem about slumming rich girls — hammed up by Captain Kirk himself!



- 10 Mike Doughty**
"Move On" BARSUK
The former Soul Coughing frontman stages an intervention for his "exasperating friend," America.



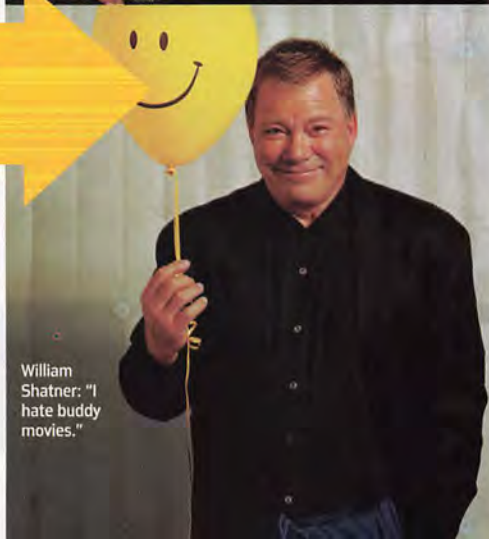
- 11 Survivor**
"Eye of the Tiger" (Starbucks version)
This coffee-chain ad reimagines Rocky as an upwardly mobile middle-manager.



Snoop: "Can you hear me nizzow?"



Dixie Chicks: Pinko commie bastards!



William Shatner: "I hate buddy movies."

- 12 LL Cool J**
"Rub My Back" DEF JAM
Timbaland mixes spare funk and digital insect swarms on LL's strangest loverman jam yet.



- 13 Domenico+2**
"Alegria, Vai Lá" LUAKA BOP/V2
Stripped-down beats from Brazilian electronica trio.



- 14 Good Charlotte**
"The Chronicles of Life and Death" EPIC
Joel Madden offers life lessons to misfits over bouncy power-pop.



- 15 Justin Timberlake and Timbaland**
"Good Foot" DREAMWORKS
From the *Shark Tale* soundtrack, J-Tim calls out jealous boyfriends.



- 16 Bright Eyes**
"Take It Easy" SADDLE CREEK
Uptempo synth-rock from Nebraska wunderkind Conor Oberst.



- 17 Slim Thug feat. Pharrell**
"I Ain't Heard of That" GEFFEN
Neptunes-endorsed rapper lays out a comprehensive plan for ho improvement.



- 18 Dixie Chicks**
"Rainbow Connection" EPIC
Sweet, fingerpicked and twangy version of Kermit the Frog's 1979 solo banger.



- 19 Bloc Party**
"Banquet" DIM MAK
For fans of Franz Ferdinand: frantic yelps and jigsaw guitar shards from London.



- 20 Juelz Santana**
"Fat Bottom" TAPEMASTERS INC.
Cam'Ron's right-hand homie turns Queen's blunt booty ode into, well, a blunter booty ode.



ICON KEY



SADDOES



HIPSTERS



RAWK



AGING HIPSTERS



CRUNKY



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MAKING OF THIS PRODUCT.
SERIOUSLY, WE SLAUGHTERED
TRUCKLOADS OF 'EM.**



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Tommy Lee

On his upcoming reality TV show, the famously well-endowed Mötley Crüe drummer is going to college. But first, he answers your questions about drugs, prison, Pink and . . . horticulture!

BY ADAM HIGGINBOTHAM
PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRIS MCPHERSON

SETTLING ONTO THE SOFA, Tommy Lee sips on a root beer, takes in the view of L.A., and thinks for a second about his autobiography, *Tommyland*. Sure, it deals with the prison time, the heroin overdose, his tempestuous marriage to Pamela Anderson and even his time in the high-school marching band. But has he left anything out? "I don't think so," he says, mildly horrified at the suggestion. "Well, maybe a few names. 'Cause I'm not spending any more time in court, thank you very much!"

Indeed, the hard-living Mötley Crüe drummer's memoir is so detailed that some of the story is even narrated by one of his most famous collaborators: his penis. With the book, a new reality show that will take him to college and an imminent Mötley Crüe reunion ("It might be fun, it might last 10 days. Who knows?") the world will be seeing more of him than ever. So he certainly isn't worried by the prospect of *Blender* readers' interrogation. "Oh," he says, "this ought to be good."

What's the deal with you and Pam right now? Where does Kid Rock fit into that?

BORT8, CHICAGO

Well, she hasn't been seeing him for a long time, so I don't know where that's all at. But we just took our kids to school for the first day of school today, and we're so civil and friendly now that I'd say it's probably better than when we were married. Sometimes I think we're definitely soul-mates. Will we get back together? I don't know. Maybe one day. I haven't ruled it out.

When did you first realize you had a huge rod?

TOOLBOX, SILVER SPRINGS, MD

Probably when I started fuckin' around with porno stars. 'Cause they see a lot of

dick. That's their job, right? So they see a lot. And then you hear from a girl, "Fuck! You've got a huge dick!" You're like, "Wow, right on! Really? Compared to what?" And then you realize: compared to all kinds of dicks! Yeah, fucking with porno stars ruined my marriage. That was in '93, right before I got divorced from Heather [Locklear].

I'm getting married. Will you DJ at my wedding? We can only pay \$500, but you can have all the shrimp you can eat.

SAYRAH98, MIDDLESEX, NJ

Sure. Oh, man! Where's it at? If it was here in town, I might consider it. If it was here, just for fun — sure.

What's the one thing you never got to do while you were on tour but wish you had?

RODNEYG, FAIRFIELD, IO

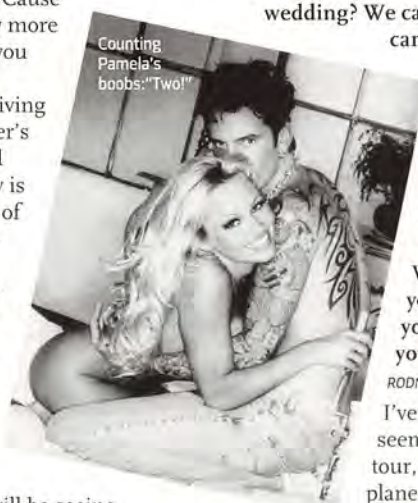
I've been everywhere but I've seen nothing. When you're on tour, you're on a bus or on a plane, you see everything through a window or from a hotel-room balcony. I always

wanted to see Mount Fuji in Japan, and we never got a chance to do that. I'm a sucker for that kind of scenery and horticulture — the bonsais and the koi ponds and all that shit. I could look at it for days.

I'm planning something special for my girlfriend's birthday. What's the most romantic thing you can recommend?

ROMEO 919, NEWELL, WV

There's a Web site I know of called Jungle Roses. You can order huge boxes of just rose petals. Fill the bathtub, cover the bed and make a long trail from the entrance of the house all the way up to the bedroom. And probably, if you have some cooking skills, it might be a nice thing if you cooked your girl a meal. Does it work? *Ab-so-lute-ly*. And there's nothing better than picking rose petals out of your girl's ass when you're all done. →



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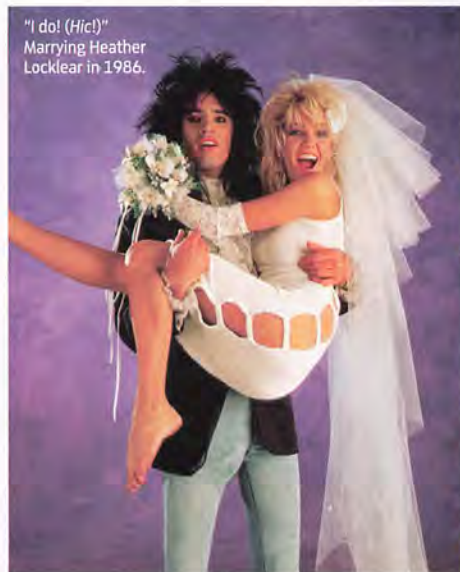
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["I'M A SUCKER FOR BONSAIS AND KOI
PONDS AND ALL THAT SHIT."





"I do! (H/c!)"
Marrying Heather
Locklear in 1986.

Is it true you once ran out of heroin, so you shot up Jack Daniel's instead?

JRP1979, OCEAN SPRINGS, MS

Yeah. We were doing heroin and cocaine and we ran out. There was only Jack left, so we filled it up and *(makes injecting noise)* boom! Obviously we weren't thinking. We could have just drank it, which is what I don't understand. It was retarded. We thought it might be fun. But you can taste it in the back of your mouth, so once we did it, I was like, "We've gone a little too far, now. What's next? Ajax? Windex?"

At what age will your sons Dylan and Brandon be allowed to get tattoos?

JACKALOPE19, BISBEE, AZ

That's a tough one. I got tattooed when I was 17. I didn't really ask. So if they were to ask, at no matter what age, I wouldn't say no. How could I? Hopefully by the time they're asking . . . they'll be old enough. *(Puts hands together to pray)* God, please!

I bet women send you naked pictures all the time. What do you do with them?

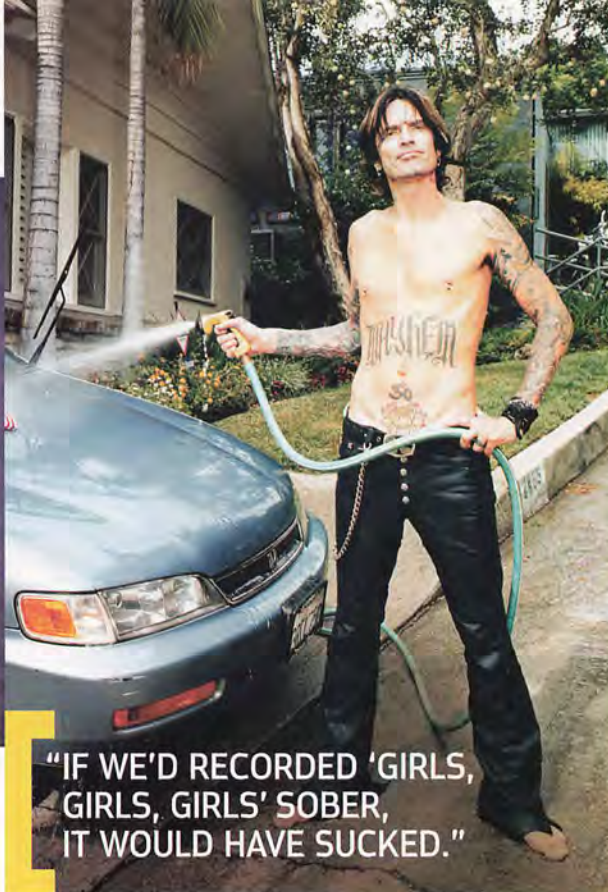
MASTERYODA, FARGO, ND

At one point, we used to keep 'em all. They were plastered inside giant wardrobe cases. But old-school Polaroids coming in the mail? I haven't seen any of those in a while. On my computer I keep the good ones on my hard drive, buried, titled something else, with a lock on and a password.

If you were giving Vince Neil a makeover, what would you do?

SROGERS, GRAND RAPIDS, MI

I would go into his closet and throw away his Hawaiian shirts. I'd get him on a serious workout program and get him a haircut — short, not super-short but not so long and '80s-looking. Musically, something cooler, a little more modern. The last record or two I worked on with those guys, I really worked hard to get the band to sound cur-



"IF WE'D RECORDED 'GIRLS, GIRLS, GIRLS' SOBER, IT WOULD HAVE SUCKED."

rent. And Vince wasn't always ready for that; he's such an old-school rocker guy.

Have you ever had a gay experience?

DOUGHCIVELY, SUWANEE, GA

Just recently, I was partying with a bunch of people. And my friend — who I had a slight idea was gay, but I didn't know for sure — drove me home. I went to bed; he stayed in the guest room. I have a combination lock on my bedroom door. All of a sudden, it's late, I hear knocking. I'm silent. This person's *really* fucked up on E. Now he starts pounding, really violently. I'm freaked out, thinking, Fuck! This guy wants to come into my bedroom? No way! The pounding stops and I think, OK. Good,

song to be fucked-up to. It's about going to strip clubs, being crazy and playing with girls. If we'd recorded that sober, it would probably have sucked.

I live in the Bay Area and I like flowers, but I don't have time to spend in the garden. Can you recommend something low-maintenance for me to grow?

SHADOWBOXER, SAN JOSE, CA

Doesn't it rain up there a lot? I don't know what grows in that climate. I'm actually more into plants and trees than flowers. *Ficus amidiata*, I think, is the technical name.

They grow fast and they'd work in that climate. They're pretty. Bamboo's always good. It grows really well.

Did you watch the Paris Hilton sex tape? How do you think it compares with yours?

CLAIRE BEETS, ATLANTA

No, I haven't seen it yet. But I heard she's got really ugly toes — that her feet are crazy-looking. I'm a foot man, so when I heard that, I was like, "I don't know if I'm gonna see it." I heard her feet are up in the camera, a lot of these crazy feet shots. And I'm like, "Ah, I don't want to see that shit."

You've been to anger-management classes. Is there anything that still makes you really mad?

KANDYKORN, DELTAVILLE, VA

Traffic. Traffic just makes me fuckin' crazy. I absolutely hate it. You're sitting there in the carpool lane, and there're no stoplights and everybody's carpooling — so where's →



Vince Neil:
Dignity.
always
dignity.



The Tommy & Pam tapes; Paris's video.



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ringtone
will you put on
today?



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the congestion coming from? Is it just one asshole up there with his foot on the brakes? How's this possible on a five-lane highway with a carpool lane, that I'm stuck just sitting here? I just make myself really angry. I turn up the radio really loud to just try to get through it. If you're ever really angry, you need to take a walk, scream, do something physical like ride a bike or do a punching bag to get the anger out of you. But if you're in a car, what can you do?

Describe a day in prison.

REYLET, GEORGETOWN, TX

OK: 6 or 7 A.M., lights on; breakfast; and then you pretty much sit around. I was in solitary confinement, so it wasn't like we hung out, played cards and threw dice. I'd read self-help, spiritual kind of books; I'd work out; write; sing melody lines or lyrics onto my answering machine at home so I wouldn't forget 'em; eat lunch; lay down. I would draw all these happy places I wanted to be on the walls, and I would sleep a lot. There was nothing else to do, so you'd sleep out of boredom. And then it's lights out at 8 or 9 o'clock. Boom! The whole place goes dark and you're like, "OK, I guess I'll sleep some more." Every two days they'd let you out for 10 minutes to shower, and every Thursday, you had a chance to go up on the roof to get some fresh air for one hour.

How many women have you slept with?

RZAPATA2003, LUBBOX, TX

Oh my God . . . does that include blowjobs? It says "slept." OK. I stopped counting a while ago, but I don't know. I'm gonna just guess. (Thinks for agonizingly long time) Fuck. I don't know. Two . . . hundred? I don't know how many. After marriage, after divorce, you stop counting.

What advice would you give normal guys to meet good-looking women?

LOANRANGER, ELIZABETHTOWN, KN

Be yourself. I see guys trying to be something they're not, trying to be these big pimps and it's like, "Dude, just be yourself. Be your charming self." That's a general one. And I've had girls come up to me, grab me by the arm and go, "Oh my God, you shave your arms! I think that's so amazing! That's one of the first things I noticed!" I don't know what that means in girl world, but a lot of women have told me that.



Mötley Crüe
test steam-
powered penis.



Arrested development: Tommy Lee after being busted — again! — in 1997.

Who made the first move, you or Pink?

MISS_UNDASTOOD, JOLIET, IL

Hmm . . . (Thinks awhile) You know what? We were just both put in a room at the same time, so I'm just gonna say: both. Or it could have been me. We were introduced and it was like, "Wow! Nice to meet you!"

And then all kinds of crazy shit. But I'm gonna say both. It takes two to tango, right?

Are you still planning to get a pet leopard?

LINDSEYLOUWHO, TACOMA, WA

I would love to one day. That's why I have the tattoo here (Points to gigantic leopard winding the length of his right arm) — it's a fantasy. I always thought it would be so cool to come home every day and have this gigantic cat just

lying on your couch, sprawled out in front of the TV. My God! That would be so cool! I knew this one lady who had one in her house, full-grown, fucking huge. We used it for a Mötley video. The leopard would sleep with her at night, in her bed.



With Pink in 2003.



With Brandon,
Pamela
and Dylan.

And I was like, "God, that's fucking awesome." They'd probably eat you out of house and home — piles and piles of steak. But I would love to get a big giant cat one day. I don't like little cats.

Do you prefer natural breasts or implants?

EVENWILDERTHINGS, VIA E-MAIL

I don't have a preference. I think there's no such thing as fake titties. I think they're all titties, and I think they're all lovely.

What's your favorite drug of all time?

TENACIOUSDORS, VIA E-MAIL

Music. That's not really a drug, though. I guess, back in the day, it was heroin 'cause it's totally unlike anything else. Everything goes away and you can just be in your moment of peace until it wears off. But then you throw up and pass out and you miss everything, like, "Man, something's not right."

Who's the biggest asshole you ever met?

RICHARDSTOFLE, SACRAMENTO, CA

Boy, oh boy. I can't say his name. Readers will know who it is. He's in a band. He was the singer — not my old band, either. Actually, you know what? There's two, and this one's even more of a fucking asshole. And he's a drummer in a band from England. Imagine being me — also a drummer — who is absolutely in love with this band, have all their records, and I finally get to meet the guy I've always wanted to meet and he fuckin' blows me completely out of the water, shaking my hand like this (Holds out hand and looks in opposite direction). I was with a friend, I said, "If you ever see me treat anyone like that — anyone — knock me the fuck out," and I went home, busted all their records and I haven't listened to that band since. [BLENDER]



Are You Experienced?

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The Greatest Songs Ever_blink 182

BLENDER EXPLORES THE FINEST TUNES IN HISTORY

blink-182, from left: Travis Barker, Mark Hoppus and Tom DeLonge



All the Small Things

Before these San Diego goofballs could conquer the pop charts, **blink-182** had to overcome alcoholism, poverty and a penchant for naked handstands



IN THE LATE summer of 1998, blink-182 turned a San Diego recording studio into a three-man frat house.

Burrito wrappers littered the furniture. Porn fanned across the floors. And pranks — many of the naked variety — ensued: “We were in the booth singing and Mark did this naked handstand,” singer-guitarist Tom DeLonge recalls. “I’m holding his legs and his dick’s right next to this expensive microphone. The engineer was so pissed!”

Such jackassery was par for the course for blink-182, but the tune they were recording *au naturel* actually marked a significant departure from the scatological goof-rock on which their burgeoning

career had been based. It was an unabashedly corny love song called “All the Small Things,” and it would prove to be a pop-punk watershed.

At the time, DeLonge, singer-bassist Mark Hoppus and drummer Travis Barker were in an unfamiliar position: They actually had something to lose. For six years, the band, which originally included drummer Scott Raynor, had been grinding through small venues in California and the Southwest. They’d play wherever they

could, to whomever stumbled in, for paltry percentages of the door receipts, usually relying on the kindness of audiences for couches to crash on. All they had were each other and “a big, brown, beat-up van” affectionately nicknamed “the Cock.”

“That was our vehicle,” DeLonge says. “It wouldn’t start back up after you turned it off. Once, we had to drive from Reno to San Diego, a good 14 hours, and every time we’d pull off to get gas we’d leave it on, hoping we didn’t blow up.”

The club-crawling, couch-surfing lifestyle suited them fine at first. “We had no money, we were very bad musicians, but that wasn’t the point,” DeLonge says. “The point was to have fun and not be in a cubicle somewhere.” But when MCA offered them a contract, they kissed the Cock goodbye to work on their major- ➔

“WE WOULD DO ANYTHING THAT MADE US LOOK STUPIDER.”

TOM DeLONGE

YOU CAN CLICK BUT YOU CAN'T HIDE

I

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label debut, *Dude Ranch*. By February 1998, the album had become a smash, eventually selling one million copies. Suddenly, they found themselves grappling with an alien concept: They could actually make a decent living from being idiots onstage — provided they didn't kill each other first.

Touring in support of *Dude Ranch*, the band tottered on the brink of self-destruction. "That was a really rough tour," Hoppus says.

DeLonge agrees: "That was the worst tour ever. Nobody showed up. At that time, our drummer had a drinking problem. One show he dropped his sticks 10 times. It was so disturbing to see someone ruining himself."

Tension within the group boiled over, and Raynor was replaced by onetime tour-mate Barker. With the

revitalized lineup, the band started recording *Enema of the State* with producer Jerry Finn (Green Day,

Rancid). DeLonge penned "All the Small Things," which stuck out instantly. "I thought it was great," Hoppus says. "It had this cool catchiness we liked immediately."

The inspiration came to DeLonge at the home he shared with girlfriend Jen Jenkins (whom he'd marry in May 2001). "I wanted to write a song with *na-nas* in it, 'cause I love the Ramones. So I thought, I'll write this song about my chick, and it'll be an ode to the Ramones, too."

Despite its mushy subject matter, the song wasn't a hard sell to the rest of the band. Says DeLonge: "After it all came together in the studio, we sat back, listened and got goosebumps. Chills. Radio was so saturated with formulaic pop songs, I was like, 'Fuck, radio will probably love this!'"

The singer was right. Released in December 1999 as the follow-up to "What's My Age Again?," "All the Small Things" hit number 6 on *Billboard*'s Singles chart. Despite its phallic double entendre, it transformed blink-182 from knucklehead novelty into pop behemoth, also inspiring a raft of young musicians.

For Simple Plan bassist David Desrosiers, the song broke loose pop-

VITAL STATISTICS

SONG
"All the Small Things"

ARTIST
blink-182

LABEL
MCA

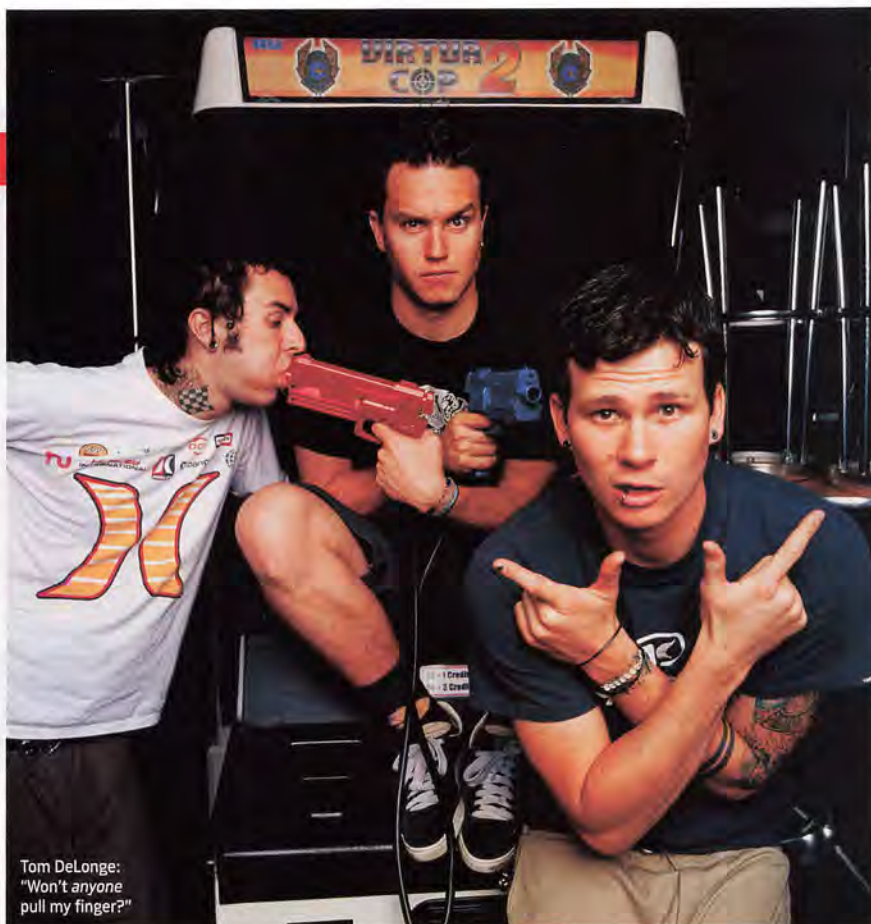
PRODUCER
Jerry Finn

PERFORMERS
Tom DeLonge
guitar, vocals
Mark Hoppus
bass, vocals
Travis Barker
drums

RELEASED
December 1999

HIGHEST CHART POSITION
6

WEEKS ON CHART
23



Tom DeLonge:
"Won't anyone
pull my finger?"

punk from a skate-park ghetto. "It blended punk attitude with pop songwriting so much better than other bands," he says.

Good Charlotte's Joel Madden is equally emphatic. "Anyone in our genre would be lying if they said they weren't influenced by blink-182," he says.

Video director Marcos Siega also had a hand in the song's success. His clip spoofed the synchronized dancing,

frosted hair and garish outfits of 'N Sync and the Backstreet Boys. "It was a time when every kid would turn on *TRL* and see boy-band videos," Siega explains. "I thought it'd be great to poke fun at that."

Says DeLonge: "We would do anything that made us look stupider; it gave us the [freedom] to make fun of whoever we wanted to."

Ironically, "All the Small Things" was a *TRL* smash, retired after 65 days on the countdown. A pointed parody and cheeky acknowledgment of blink-182's own emerging stardom, the clip tapped the teen-pop zeitgeist and torpedoed it, too.

"It was awful trying to learn the dance routines!" Hoppus recalls. "We went to this rehearsal, I was wearing spandex and legwarmers. That's actually where I met my wife — she was an MTV talent executive. Tom always used to embarrass me: Any girl he'd talk to, he'd say, 'Hey, you wanna go on a date with Mark?' He asked Skye [Everly], my wife, who looked at me and said, 'No.' That's how it all started."

At the 2000 MTV Video Music Awards, the clip nabbed Best Group Video. Blink-182 closed out the show on a stage mobbed by midgets. "It was amazing, this feeling of things starting to snowball," Hoppus says.

"Next thing, we started touring arenas," DeLonge says. "I was sad at the last show, because I thought it would never happen again. And here we are, still doing them." **JONAH WEINER**

WHO'S WHO

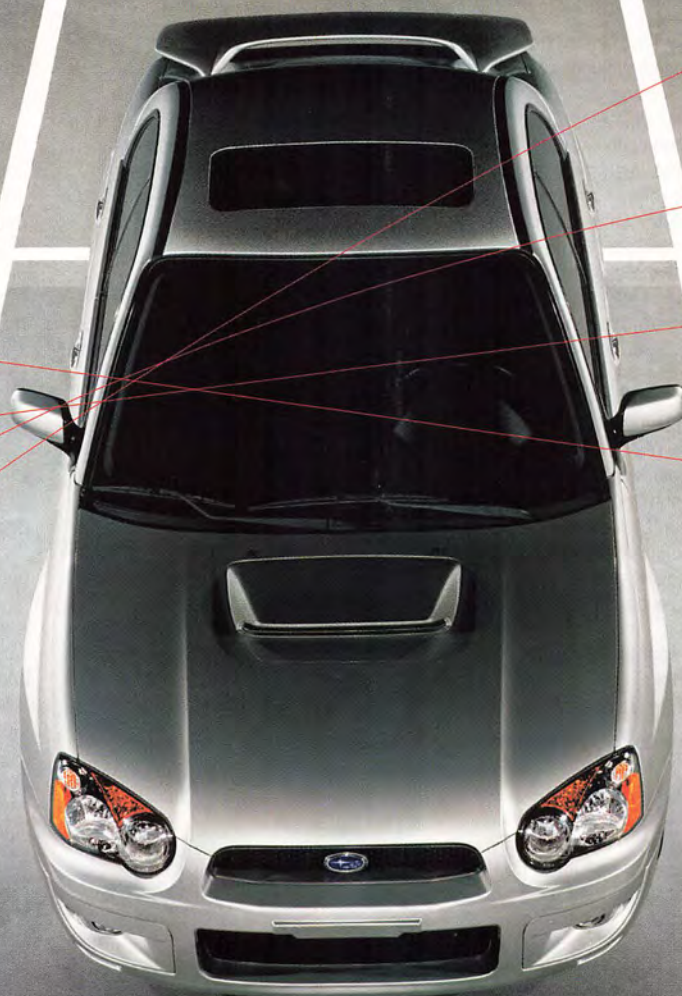
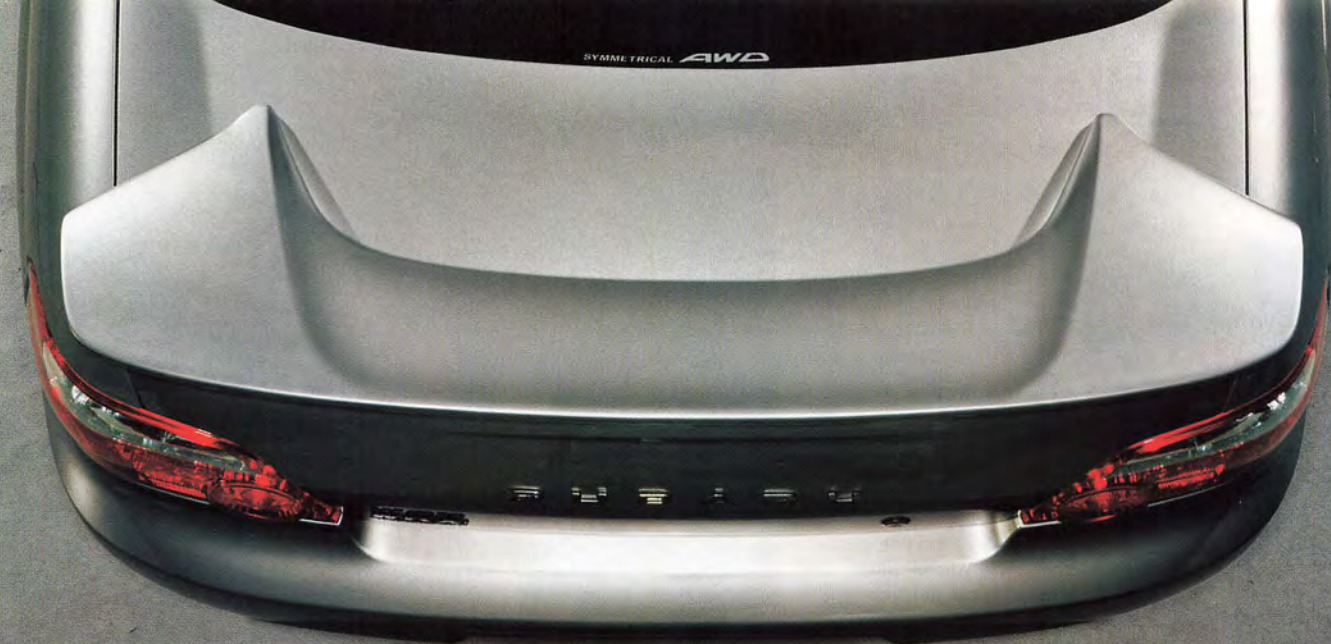


TOM DeLONGE, 29
Nasal-voiced singer-guitarist and political activist

MARK HOPPUS, 32
Nudity-inclined singer-bassist and co-owner of Atticus clothing company

TRAVIS BARKER, 29
Heavily tattooed drummer who joined the band in 1998; runs boutique record label LaSalle

MARCOS SIEGA, 35
Music-video director; has also worked with Weezer and Papa Roach



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0-60 mph comparisons based on testing by *Car and Driver*: Subaru WRX (10/01), Audi TT 1.8T Quattro (8/03), Nissan 350Z Touring (8/03), Porsche Boxster (8/03), BMW 330i w/performance package (9/03) and manufacturer's specs for the BMW Z4 2.5i. The ABC's of Safety: Air bags. Buckle up. Children in backseat.

Ask Blender

SOLVING YOUR POP CONUNDRUMS SINCE 2001



Frank Sinatra (left) and George Michael

I heard that George Michael once had a beef with Frank Sinatra. What happened?

LESLEY WOOD, TAOS, NM

It was pretty tame in modern hip-hop terms. The wildly different singers weren't exactly the types for threatening violence (well, except for Sinatra). But Michael certainly got under Sinatra's skin, and vice versa.

In 1990, the former Wham! singer was still firmly in the closet and hurting from press hounds sniffing around his private life. In an interview with Robert Hilburn of the *L.A. Times*, he complained that the intrusions were making him miserable and that he would not be producing videos to accompany his next album.

Upon reading this, Sinatra fired off a letter to the paper claiming that Michael was being ungrateful. This was pretty weird since Sinatra virtually wrote the book on cantankerous bust-ups with the press. Anyway, after ranting that the young star should be thanking God for what he had been given, Sinatra implored, "Come on, George. Loosen up. Swing, man. Dust off those gossamer wings and fly yourself to the moon of your choice."

Michael was reportedly horrified by the icon's personal attack but decided not to respond. Still, the *Times*' letters page was full of the debate about which singer was right. One correspondent defending Michael wrote: "A performer is, foremost, a human being, not a commodity, a wind-up toy or machine." The spat even spawned a *Saturday Night Live* skit, with host Kyle McLachlan playing the uptight young star.

Is Toto's "Rosanna" really about Rosanna Arquette?

BRIANNE MURRAY, SAN MATEO, CA

Not quite. It's a little confusing, actually. The comely actress started dating Toto keyboardist Steve Porcaro in 1981, but the 1982 hit was by singer David Paich. No, he wasn't trying to tell her something; he was just paying tribute for her help at the band's late-night recording sessions. "It has to do with my showing up at the studio at 4 A.M. bringing them juice and beer," she explained in 1983.

Apart from that, Paich also simply liked the name. He later admitted: "'Rosanna' is about three girls that I knew all rolled into one. After I met Rosanna Arquette, I think I just stole her name and stuck it on there."

After splitting from Porcaro, the actress got pretty irked when people continued to associate her with a



Queen, just prior to a brutal beating by the style police.

I remember hearing a story about some rock party in the '70s that had dwarves serving cocaine from trays on their heads. Who was the band and is it true?

J.T. OWENS, WINDSOR, CT

➤➤ The band was Queen, the party was their notorious 1978 New Orleans Halloween bash for the launch of their album *Jazz*, and the famed dwarf-coke-headtray story? Probably not true. Interviewed recently, drummer Roger Taylor said that he certainly didn't remember any dwarves.

That said, the party, held in the Imperial Room of the Fairmont Hotel, was pretty decadent. Four hundred music-biz revelers witnessed the city's weirdest attractions: fire-eaters, drag queens, strippers, female mud

wrestlers. And young men and women were reportedly available in a back room to supply oral sex to needy partygoers. Freddie Mercury supposedly quipped: "Most hotels offer their clients room service — this one offers them lip service!"

When Queen were hiring the street performers, their management decided to draw the line at taking on one particular act that bit the heads off live chickens. Given all this, it's understandable there were rumors exaggerating some of the evening's entertainment. But in no contemporary accounts of the evening does the coke-wielding dwarf story appear. Think about it: What if somebody tripped? Even in the excessive 1970s, music executives wouldn't risk losing that much cocaine.

song to which she had little personal connection. However, according to Paich, another Toto song really is about her: Porcaro's "A Secret Love."

And that's not all: She's believed to be the muse who inspired Peter Gabriel's 1986 single "In Your Eyes," and the dissolution of their romance is glumly

detailed on 1992's *Us*. She's thanked on the liner notes for "all your love and support that I didn't properly acknowledge."

While we're on the subject, Arquette is also thanked on Michael Jackson's *Thriller* album (on which the Toto keyboard-player guested) — although she is named incorrectly as "Rosanna Porcaro." Clearly an inspiring lady.

Could you tell me what Dave Grohl says in that low-voiced part of the Foo Fighters' "Everlong"?

RYAN SCHNEIDERMAN, VIA E-MAIL

For that part of the song from *The Colour and the Shape*, Grohl decided he needed some indecipherable whispering. He took three audio tracks and merged them so nobody could easily make out the words. On the first track, he was reading out a love letter. On the second he's reading from a technical manual. The third — and why not? — is a little story concerning the father of one of the studio technicians. Any deeply hidden meanings are, therefore, entirely in the mind of the listener. [BLENDER]



YOUR QUESTIONS

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REQUIEM FOR A SUPER FREAK

IN AUGUST, MUSIC LOST ONE OF ITS MOST BRILLIANT, DERANGED AND ULTIMATELY TRAGIC FIGURES. *BLENDER* INVESTIGATES THE METEORIC RISE AND DRUG-BLASTED FALL OF **RICK JAMES.**

★
BY ROBERT LEVINE
★

Rick James personally interviewed all of his secretaries.



Three days before he died, Rick James was running errands like anyone else. He woke up a bit before noon in his apartment in Los Angeles, and took his 12-year-old son Tazman to the Verizon store in Topanga to buy him a cellphone. His personal assistant and two teenage relatives piled into James's Infiniti for the ride.

James was in a good mood, and on the drive over he cranked up one of his old CDs and they all sang along. It was sweltering out, but he was wearing Timberlands, green cords and a green silk long-sleeved shirt. As always, James dressed to make an impression.

And as always, he did. In the store, James greeted an old friend and they started loudly joking around. The other customers — two young girls and their father — turned to look. He ignored them. Tazman and the teenagers scoped out the phones, and James sat down in a chair near the counter and started talking on his cell, joking just as loudly. The other people kept staring.

Even people who didn't recognize James knew he was *someone*. That day, though, James left no doubt who he was. Right before the conversation with his friend ended, he barked one last thing into his phone: "I'm Rick James, bitch!"



IF THERE WAS one thing the man born James Johnson loved more than anything else, it was being Rick James. And in 2004, after more than a decade in the wilderness, being Rick James finally meant something again.

For years, his reputation as one of rock & roll's most electrifying performers

was obscured by trials, allegations of torture, years lost to cocaine. But a February 2004 episode of Comedy Central's *Chappelle's Show* made him famous all over again.

Dave Chappelle's cartoonish impersonation of James traded on the extremes of the musician's '80s identity. As portrayed on the show, James was an embodiment of disco-era anything-goes abandon, a man with a heroic disregard for the norms of civilized behavior. Now people loved him for it. Most of his albums may have been long out of print, but by the middle of the year, his face was on hipster T-shirts across the country. And everyone knew that catchphrase.

James enjoyed Chappelle's skits. "He said it turned the lights back on, the lime-light," says Charlie Murphy, a *Chappelle's Show* regular whose recollections of meeting James at his decadent peak led to the infamous episode.

"He consciously turned himself into that Rick James persona," says Bobby Brooks, an engineer-producer who knew him since the early '80s. Even at 56, after suffering a stroke and receiving a pacemaker, James Johnson was still determined to live like a super freak. He



Dave Chappelle, launching that catchphrase.



indulged in outsized amounts of everything. When he'd go for dinner at Le Dôme, he'd ask for a good table and order every entrée on the menu. If he went to a club, he'd drive onto the sidewalk so he could make a big entrance — the valet would sort everything out.

"He had to be the center of attention," says his daughter Ty James, 27. Before the *Chappelle's Show* episode aired, Rick called Tazman's mother, his ex-wife Tanya Hijazi, to make sure they didn't miss it.

And all the attention created a new wave of interest in James's work. By the end of July, he had recorded enough material for a double album; he was trying to find a publisher for his autobiography, *Memoirs of a Super Freak*; he had

Above: Arnold Turner/WireImage.com (casket). Timeline, below: Lennon Aclemon/AP Wide World Photos (James in pool); Ron Galella/WireImage.com (with Mary Jane Girls); David McGeough/Getty Images (with Eddie Murphy)

THE HIGH LIFE

Blazing success, a humiliating fall and an untamable addiction . . .



"This way I can play and pee at the same time!"

1948
James Ambrose Johnson Jr., the third of eight children, is born Feb. 1, in Buffalo, NY.

1964
AWOL from the U.S. Naval Reserves, he forms **THE MYNAH BIRDS** with Neil Young. The band record a single for Motown.

1977
Using his own money, James records "You and I," which becomes his first big hit.

1978
James's first full-length album *Come Get It!* goes gold.

1981
James releases *Street Songs*, featuring "Super Freak." The album sells four million copies and makes him a bona fide superstar.

1983
Deciding to concentrate on producing, James puts together the lingerie-clad **MARY JANE GIRLS**, who release two hit albums.

1986
James writes "Party All the Time" and gives the song to **EDDIE MURPHY**.



tionship I had with my son," LeMelle says. "Once he told me, 'I want to play ball with my son, I want to take him to school, but I can't.' He said, 'Rick won't let me.' "

JAMES JOHNSON WAS born on February 1, 1948, in a Buffalo, New York, housing project. Dad walked out on the family and mom provided for eight kids by running numbers for the Mob. Rick, remembers Levi Ruffin Jr., a classmate and later the keyboard player in the Stone City Band, "got kicked out of school a lot." But he didn't stand out much in a neighborhood where most kids got into a little trouble. At 15, he joined the U.S. Naval Reserves.

The next time Ruffin saw him, it was almost a decade later. "Someone honked outside my apartment in a white Mercedes," he says. It was his old friend, flashing fancy, expensive-looking clothes. "He didn't have the money but he had the attitude," Ruffin says. James had spent two years in Toronto, where he had gone AWOL from the Reserves, discovered the hippie scene, and formed a band called the Mynah Birds with Neil Young and Nick St. Nicholas, later of Steppenwolf. He did some time in the brig when the Navy caught up with him. He then spent years traveling the world, playing gigs as a sideman and writing songs at Motown.

With Ruffin on board, James formed an early version of the Stone City Band and used his own money to record 1978's *Come Get It!* His first single, "You and I," was a number 1 hit. But he also attracted attention for playing marathon shows that featured the kind of arena-rock theatrics (and, eventually, pyrotechnics) employed →

just played a string of concerts with his old Motown protégée Teena Marie; and was thinking about a solo tour. He was even talking to Jamie Foxx about producing a reality show based on his family, an *Osbournes* for the BET set. Hijazi was moving back to L.A. with their son after years in Atlanta, and his personal life was looking up. "He had a second chance," Ty James says. "He enjoyed every second of it."

But on August 6, Rick James was found dead in his apartment by his live-in personal assistant. He died in his sleep, apparently of heart failure. A toxicology report revealed that when he died, he had in his system cocaine, methamphetamine, Valium, Vicodin and Xanax. No drug was at a level that would kill a healthy person.

But James was anything but: He had a history of heart disease, diabetes and sleep apnea, and had been overweight for years.

Danny LeMelle, a longtime friend and collaborator, had seen this flip side of James's hedonism: That of a man on antidepressants, tormented by his failure to overcome addiction, and trapped by his supersized alter ego. "He saw the rela-

"Super Freak" returns to the charts as a sample in **MC HAMMER'S** "U Can't Touch This." James thinks sampling is silly, changes his mind when the royalty checks roll in.

Frances Alley alleges James burned her with a crack pipe and forced her to have oral sex with Tanya Hijazi. Later, he's convicted only of supplying her with drugs.

James and Hijazi party in an L.A. hotel room with music executive Mary Sauger, who later says the couple held her captive and beat her.

James is sentenced to five years in prison. He serves two years at Folsom State, where the female correctional officers vie for his attention.

James is **RELEASED FROM PRISON**, carrying an extra 30 pounds and resolves to remain sober. He falls off the wagon within a year.

Onstage in Denver during the Urban Rapsody tour, James **SUFFERS A STROKE**. He recuperates in a Los Angeles hospital, where he orders in lobster.

James gets a pacemaker implanted to help with heart trouble. Within a month, he begins using cocaine again.

James appears in a skit on **CHAPPELLE'S SHOW** in February, saying, "Cocaine is a hell of a drug."

On August 6, James is found dead of a heart attack precipitated by the use of a pharmacopia of illegal drugs.



Top: Lennon McIendon/AP Wide World Photos. Timeline, below: Frank W. Ockenfels 3/Corbis Outline (MC Hammer); Khue Bui/Corbis Sygma (James released from prison); Neal Preston/Corbis Outline (James in hospital)



**SUPER FREAKY
SEXPLOITS!**

GIVE IT TO ME, BABY!

If Rick James's bedroom walls could talk, they'd say, "That's one freaky mother!"

FEMALE MIDGETS!

In 2002, producer Danny LeMelle, arrived at James's house, where a woman told him his friend would be right out and asked him to wait. Five people emerged from the bedroom, including a man and a female midget, before James himself appeared. "That kind of stuff happened all the time," LeMelle says.

MYSTERY WIFE!

In the '70s, Rick James got married but neglected to inform his friends, including Stone City Band keyboardist Levi Ruffin. Ruffin himself only found out on a little trip to Canada: "We went into this hotel and he was talking to her and he said 'That's my wife,'" remembers Ruffin. "We had no idea."

NEVER REALIZED HE HAD A ROSE GARDEN!

After moving into a \$10 million mansion formerly owned by actor Mickey Rooney, James spent so much time getting high smoking cocaine that it took the musician three months to realize there was a rose garden at the rear of the building.

DRUG WHORES!

For James the word "strawberry" is said to have denoted not a delicious summer fruit but, rather, girls who would do anything for drugs.

IN THE CLOSET!

While visiting New York in the early '80s James and LeMelle met two women who were invited to visit them at the Park Plaza hotel. When the pair returned to the hotel, they found an unfamiliar fur coat on the floor of their suite and the two women, now naked, in the closet. *ROBERT LEVINE*

★ RICK JAMES

by groups like Kiss. "He had this vision of how he wanted things to look," LeMelle recalls. James purposefully hired band members who were over 6 feet tall, then had them grow braids and shake glitter into their hair before they performed. "Rick said we need to be living like rock stars," LeMelle says.

James had the same kind of singular vision in the studio, where he was known to be a demanding boss. "People could sit around and drink or get high and that's when he'd turn around and say, 'You're on!'" says Lisa Sarna, one of James's original backup singers. "The focus wasn't on drugs, it was on making music." At first, says Brooks, the drugs helped James work. During recording sessions for *Street Songs*, Brooks remembers James showing him a jade jar full of cocaine and telling him the two of them could split it because the band had their own.

Gradually, though, the studio started to seem like a nightclub. Robin Williams would stop by, and he and James would try to outdo each with weird jokes. Another time, when James and the Stone City Band were recording at the Record Plant in Sausalito, California, Grace Slick stopped in to say hello and ended up expressing her concern. "She sat us down and said, 'Look, drugs can take you into a world but then you have to come out of it,'" LeMelle recounts. "I listened and a couple of the other guys listened. Rick listened for a while, but that wasn't what he was going to do."

Released in 1981, *Street Songs* made James one of the biggest stars of the nascent decade. "His music was the funkiest thing out there," Parliament and Funkadelic pioneer George Clinton says. "Rick was the only one at the time staying nasty and keeping the groove going." Inspired by a few months he spent in his old Buffalo neighborhood, the album was more varied than anything he had done before. "Fire and Desire," an erotically charged duet with Teena Marie, became his best-loved ballad. "Mr. Policeman" added politics to his usual subject matter of sex and drugs. And the funk-rock classic "Super Freak" became a Top 10 hit twice: once at the time and again in 1990, as the basis of MC Hammer's "U Can't Touch This."

The subsequent tour broke attendance records set by rock bands and solidified James's status as a superstar. He began dating *Exorcist* child star Linda Blair, and hanging out in flashy nightclubs like Stu-



With daughter Ty, 2002

dio 54 and Xenon — with a celebrity crowd that included Eddie Murphy and Rick and Kathy Hilton, parents of Paris and Nicky. He bought weed by the trash bag, treated his musicians and road crew to a Hawaiian vacation, and gradually started using more cocaine. "We used to say we would never let women or drugs destroy the band," Ruffin recalls. But the signs were there. James, who said he would never freebase after seeing what it did to Sly Stone, had started smoking cocaine himself.

As his habit got worse, he started to hide it from friends, sometimes staying in a separate hotel when traveling. Before a *Saturday Night Live* appearance, Ruffin confronted him about his drug use. "He said, 'Fuck you all, my name is Rick James,'" Ruffin says. "I said, 'Your name

is James Johnson.'" Then Ruffin had to write out the words to "Super Freak" because James couldn't recall them. In August 1982, he collapsed onstage and cancelled the next six weeks' shows.

After the tour, James continued to work in the studio, producing a song for a Temptations' come-

back album and putting together the Mary Jane Girls, the softcore R&B group that had a hit with "In My House." Gradually, though, the hits stopped coming. By the middle of the '80s, LeMelle says, "Rick couldn't put down the pipe to get into the studio." Instead, he spent most of the next five years holed up in his house on Mullholland Terrace — Mickey Rooney's old place — where he had an assistant put tinfoil over all the windows.

Having alienated most of his friends and bandmates, James hosted a party that never stopped. "One night, he called and said, 'Leave the gate open, I have people coming over,'" remembers Dave Addison, who worked for James as his personal →

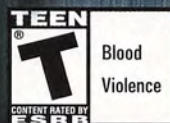
BY THE MID-'80S, "RICK COULDN'T PUT DOWN THE PIPE." DANNY LeMELLE

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manager at the time. "I stopped counting at 75."

James's generosity with drugs made his house a magnet for people looking to get high. In July 1991, a woman named Frances Alley came over and smoked cocaine with James and Hijazi. Days later, she told police James had tied her to a chair, forced her to have oral sex with Hijazi and burned her with a knife and a crack pipe. The police asked James to come to the station for questioning. "He said, 'I'm not goin' nowhere. If they want to talk to me, they can come here and talk to me,'" Addison says. Days later, they raided James's house, arresting him and Hijazi.

Out on bail, the two went to live with Hijazi's mother in Agoura Hills. Hijazi stopped using drugs when she learned she was pregnant with Tazman, and James tried his best to quit, but kept backsliding. In November 1992, James and Hijazi met Mary Sauger in a hotel room to discuss business, then smoked some cocaine. According to Sauger, James prevented her from leaving and proceeded to beat her repeatedly.

The trial for the charges from both incidents was a media circus. The prosecution portrayed James as a cracked-out Marquis de Sade. James insisted Frances Alley had flat-out lied and that he had hit Sauger to defend Hijazi, who was pregnant at the time. His behavior during the trial didn't help his case, though. He'd get high at night and doze off in the courtroom, drooling and snoring loudly. "The day I went, the judge stopped the trial, and I remember me and his sister taking him down to the cafeteria and giving him coffee," producer Bobby Brooks remembers. "I told him, 'You need to be awake, otherwise you're going to have a lot of time to sleep in a motherfuckin' cell.'"

On September 18, 1993, James was convicted for providing Alley with cocaine and imprisoning and assaulting Sauger. (Although Alley's charges of torture have become part of the Rick James legend, he wasn't found guilty of them.) Due to allegations that one of the witnesses against James was copping heroin from someone at the district attorney's office, James got a relatively light sentence: five years and four months. The judge told him he was lucky: "If I'd had my way, I'd have thrown away the key."

In jail, James got off drugs, wrote songs, and began penning his memoir. In a prison interview, he said he wasn't the



"I'm sure I stashed some crack in that pit." On *Solid Gold*, 1982.



"No, Rick, I will not projectile vomit on you." With *Exorcist* star Linda Blair.



In court with then girlfriend Tanya, 1991.

THE JUDGE TOLD JAMES, "IF I'D HAD MY WAY, I'D HAVE THROWN AWAY THE KEY."

raging maniac he'd been made out to be during the trial. "What I am is James Johnson," he said at the time, "also known as Rick James, who happened to let his life run amok because of a fucking pipe and a rock of cocaine."

WHEN JAMES LEFT Folsom State Prison in the summer of 1996, he went right to work. With LeMelle producing, he recorded *Urban Rhapsody*, a slightly more introspective album that was reviewed well and promoted poorly. By the next year, though, even as he was giving interviews touting his newfound sobriety, James was beginning to miss rehearsals for the comeback tour. "He started hitting the pipe hard," LeMelle says.

In November 1998, James suffered a stroke onstage in Denver as he was singing "Fire and Desire." At first he didn't

know what had happened, and he finished the song before going to the hospital. In Los Angeles, checked into Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, he recuperated in typical style, ordering in lobster tails and having them brought to his bedside. When

LeMelle came to visit him, he confided that he had been scared he was going to die. LeMelle replied that he didn't believe him, and he didn't believe it would keep him away from cocaine for long. James just looked away.

LeMelle was right, of course. James went right back to his old habits. The longest period he ever remembers James staying off cocaine was three weeks. The stroke had left James with a slight limp, but he just turned that into a part of his pimp strut.

When he was sober, Rick James was funny, generous and creative. He would spend days recording with Brooks and LeMelle. But although he tried to stay straight, he never succeeded for long. Over the years he turned to religion — he became interested in both Christianity and Islam — and went into rehab 13 different times, according to Hijazi. Usually, he'd charm the nurses; once, when he met one he couldn't soften up, he was thrown out of a facility for threatening her. He knew the addiction recovery process so well that he helped other people get sober, including Bobby Brown. "Rick was like my older brother," says Jessica Shapiro, Hijazi's sister. "He was a very big presence in everybody's life."

In 1999, Hijazi moved out of the house she and James were sharing in Woodland Hills; they were divorced in June, but remained close. After she left, "He never wanted to be in the house alone," says his daughter Ty. There wasn't a permanent party, the way there was on Mullholland, but there was always something happening. "He kept some chicks around," she says. "Quote me on that."

A year and a half ago, Danny LeMelle went to Woodland Hills for a meeting →

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2004

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— TOUR SERIES —

PRESENTS

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★ RICK JAMES

with James. A woman in strange-looking makeup answered the door and told him that Rick would be out of his room in a few minutes. But the next person who walked out of James's room was another woman, followed by a man — and then a female midget. "And then the ringmaster comes out — Rick — and just says, 'I'll see you all later.' That kind of stuff," LeMelle says, "happened *all the time*."



IN A WAREHOUSE-turned-studio in downtown L.A., Ty James is working on her own music as she decides what to do with the songs her father left. Since Tazman is underage and her



James photographed earlier this year.

full brother, Rick Jr., doesn't know much about the music business, Ty is organizing the effort to find a label for the album he completed and a publisher for his book. One of her first projects is putting together a DVD, "a celebration of his life" that will include tributes from musicians he influenced.

James was trying to get his career on track when he died, but it's hard to say whether he would have succeeded. The

shows he performed this spring with Teena Marie were paced so he could do a couple of songs in a row, then take a break. Even then, he'd have trouble catching his breath. "Every time we'd do a show and he couldn't breathe, I'd get really nervous," Marie recalls. "But the times I saw him onstage were some of the happiest I'd seen him."

At a few concerts, he overexerted himself so much that paramedics had to give him oxygen. "I don't think it scared him at all," Ty James says. "That's the type of person that he was."

It's impossible to be certain what role the drugs played in James's death, and the autopsy concluded they were one of several factors. "Cocaine would be the most serious drug for someone with his health conditions," says Dr. Drew Pinsky, an addiction specialist and the host of "Loveline" on the L.A. radio station KROQ. "And speed can overload the oxygen demands of the heart and brain so you're more likely to get a heart attack. He was only enhancing the possibility of something happening."

It's tempting to remember Rick James as a larger-than-life character who loved the stage so much he essentially stared down death and growled, "I'm Rick James, bitch." But James Johnson is another story. In a small, sparsely furnished room upstairs from the stu-

"HE DIDN'T WANT HIS LIFE STORY TO BE PORTRAYED AS A JOKE." TY JAMES

dio, Ty uncovers a few pages of the unbound manuscript of his memoir. It's blunt and to the point. She didn't want to read it before her father's death, but she's working her way through it now. "I was in tears this morning," she says. "A lot of times I feel like he wasn't very happy with himself."

As much as he loved Dave Chappelle's skits, James didn't want the comedian to play him in a movie they discussed. "He didn't want his life story portrayed as a joke," Ty says. He knew there was a lot more to it.

"People thought he was having a good time," Levi Ruffin says. "He was not having as good a time as everybody thought." [BLENDER]

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Did I mention
I'm the Naked
Cowboy?

PHOTOGRAPH BY MATTHEW SALACUSE
BY CLARK COLLIS

SPEND OUR CASH!
THE BAND
Simple Plan

THE MISSION
To spend \$848 in one
day any way they want

THE REASON
Blender asked them to!

"WE LOVE TROUBLE!"

When Canadian mall-punks **Simple Plan** decided to take half of New York on a bus ride, Blender didn't realize they meant the crazy half!

"I'M NOT SURE we chose a good day to do this," Simple Plan's lead guitarist Jeff Stinco says, introducing himself to *Blender* in the foyer of a New York hotel. "There is some . . . roughness around."

Blender has been dreading just such a scenario. Offered the chance to spend \$848 of the magazine's cash any way they see fit, the Montreal pop-punkers have decided to rent an open-top double-decker bus to cruise around New York, see the sights in style and pick up some passengers along the way. It's a good idea.

Or is it? Our trip is due to start in just a few minutes' time, at the decidedly un-rock & roll hour of 9 A.M. To make mat-

ters worse, the 26-year-old Stinco informs *Blender* that the band went to see former tourmates Green Day perform last night, then headed off to an after-show party which didn't wind down until 4 A.M.

So it doesn't come as a huge surprise when, after *Blender* asks the newly arrived sunglasses-clad singer Pierre Bouvier, 25, if he's OK, the frontman utters an abrupt "No!" before stumbling off in search of the nearest McDonald's.

Mercifully, bassist David Desrosiers, 24, soon joins the group and explains that he, at least, is relatively *compos mentis*.

"I only had one drink last night," he says. "You want to know how un-rock &

roll I am? I haven't been drunk since March. I like bubble teas — milky tea with tapioca balls. We were doing that Mary-Kate and Ashley movie and I sent for one. I was like, 'Hey, twins, suck my balls!'"

The movie in question was this year's *New York Minute*, the plot of which found Mary-Kate Olsen playing hooky from school to attend a Simple Plan video shoot. This kind of exposure, combined with the pop sheen that sugarcoated the gently angst lyrics of their 2002 debut, *No Pads, No Helmets . . . Just Balls*, resulted in over one million sales. Their new CD, *Still Not Getting Any . . .*, was produced by legendary knob-twiddler Bob



Simple Plan, from left: Sébastien Lefebvre, Pierre Bouvier (Naked Cowboy), Jeff Stinco, Chuck Comeau and David Desrosiers

Rock, who's previously spurred the likes of Metallica and Mötley Crüe onto superstardom. The smart money is on Simple Plan following suit.

"This is different from when our first album came out," Stinco says, marveling at the interest now being shown. "That was, like, 'OK, we're ready to do some interviews.' But no one was interested."

With the return of Bouvier and the arrival of drummer Chuck Comeau, 25, and guitarist Sébastien Lefebvre, 23, we walk across the street. There, we find both the bus and a driver amiable enough to let Stinco get in behind the wheel — at least while the double-decker is stationary.

"New York is nuts. I love this place!" Stinco says after we have taken our seats upstairs and the bus has rumbled out into the traffic. "It's like Montreal times a hundred! But Montreal strip joints are the best in the world. They're cheap, and everything goes. And the women are beautiful. The men, too, so I heard. Isn't that right, Chuck?"

"Yeah," Comeau deadpans. The others hoot with laughter.

Simple Plan have the kind of relaxed rapport you might expect from people who, with the exception of Desrosiers, have known each other since high school. But, while Comeau is happy enough to take his share of ribbing, it's clear the drummer is one of the band's leaders. More obviously serious than his bandmates, he also helps write the songs with Bouvier, and is first off the mark when *Blender* asks what the title of their new album refers to.

"It means we're still not getting good reviews," he grumbles good-naturedly.

We assumed it meant you still weren't getting any sex.

"There's that, too," an increasingly alive-looking Bouvier says.

As we turn onto Broadway, Stinco grabs a megaphone and tries to tempt people onto the bus. At first, his efforts are in vain, but then he gets the attention of the Naked Cowboy, a Times Square institution who plays guitar in nothing but a cowboy hat, boots and tighty-whites.

Within seconds, Mr. Cowboy has bounded onto the bus and launched into an impromptu song with lyrics that consist solely of "I'm the Naked Cowboy!/ Here with Simple Plan!" For an encore, he launches an enthusiastic endorsement of self-help guru Tony Robbins, who inspired him, for reasons never made clear, to become the Naked Cowboy in the first place.

Two blocks on, we encounter a street corner full of people extolling the benefits of Energizer batteries, one of whom is dressed as the famously relentless bunny. Stinco immediately launches a megaphone-enhanced spiel: "Hey, Mr. Bunny! Energize us! We're doing a *Blender* shoot! We need some loving!" Sadly, the Bunny proves too wide to fit through the bus door, but most of his associates make the journey, as do several confused but happy Japanese vacationers and a camera crew, which has magically appeared.

How did I miss those nuns?



Meanwhile, the band head downstairs to pose for tourists with the Bunny and the Cowboy, who's now singing an oddly familiar ditty: "I'm the Naked Cowboy!/ Here with the Energizer Bunny!" By now, the general mêlée on and off the bus has stalled traffic in all directions.

"We love trouble," Bouvier says. "We just don't normally get into it this early."

Eventually, we are forced to set off again without any of our new friends. The band alternate between pointing out New York landmarks and relaying tales of rock & roll excess passed on to them by Bob Rock.

"There was the 'Why wait' story," Stinco says. "One night, Mötley Crüe were having dinner

and, at that point, everybody had stopped drinking. But they decide to have one glass of wine. As soon as Nikki Sixx takes a sip, one of the other guys is on the phone calling the pusher getting the drugs. When they asked him what he was doing, he was like, 'Why wait? Why wait? Let's just go.' Ha!"

Suddenly the guitarist points down at the sidewalk: "Look, someone selling watches out of a suitcase!"

Indeed there is, and a very shady-looking fellow he is, too. Regardless, Stinco demands that the bus stops. He jumps off and is soon in deep haggling mode.

"I'll give you 10 bucks for that Rolex."

"Thirty."

"It's a fake."

"Yeah, but it's a good fake."

In the end, Stinco exchanges the last \$20 of *Blender*'s cash on the fake, ominously ticking "Rolex." He then returns to our ride only to be braced by an old lady who's wandered onto the bus and wants to know where it's going.

"It's going wherever you want to go," he replies. This is enough to have her scuttling back to the sidewalk and, with no other likely takers in sight, we reluctantly head back to the hotel.

"We learned a lot today from the Naked Cowboy about shameless promotion," says Stinco. "It's time I started playing the guitar naked. We need more gay guys at our shows — and that could be the way to do it!" [*BLENDER*]





IN 2004, OUR pop stars did exactly what they were supposed to – made great music and got into great heaps of trouble. In the next 28 pages, *Blender* takes a misty-eyed look back at the year in music and mayhem. Plus, we crown our second annual Woman of the Year. All hail Gwen Stefani!

04



50

THE GREATEST CDs OF 2004

The year's most splendid half-century of musical collections, ranked for your pleasure. Plus: secrets of the stars who made them!

BY NICK CATUCCI, CLARK COLLIS, JOSH EELLS, ANDY PEMBERTON, ROB TANNENBAUM AND JONAH WEINER



2
FRANZ FERDINAND
FRANZ FERDINAND

THIS GLASGOW FOP SQUAD NEVER DROPS THE BEAT.



FOR KINNING PARK
ROSS SHIELDS ROAD
ROAD WEST STREET
CK BRIDGE STREET



THIS SIDE FOR ST. GEORGES X
PARTICK CROSS COWCADDENS
HILLHEAD BUCHANAN ST
KELVINBRIDGE ST. ENOCH





50
JANET JACKSON
DAMITA JO VIRGIN
 From 2004's most notorious flasher, mature, sexy R&B that is hotter than a Super Bowl halftime show.



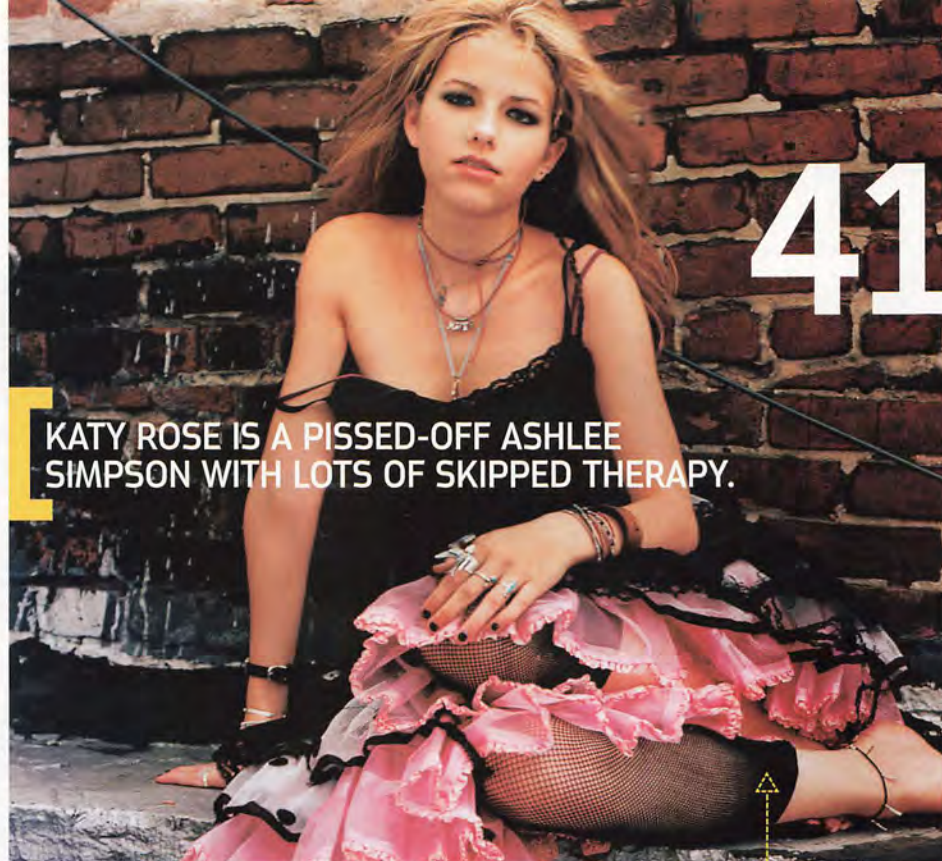
48
KASEY CHAMBERS
WAYWARD ANGEL REPRISE
 Oz's hottest cowgirl gets bittersweet on her third U.S. release.



49
THE THERMALS
FUCKIN' A SUB POP
 The numbers are in on this Portland punk trio's sophomore set: 12 songs, 28 minutes, 93 blown amps.



47
A.C. NEWMAN
THE SLOW WONDER MATADOR
 The Canadian power-pop whiz, sans his New Pornographer buds.



KATY ROSE IS A PISSED-OFF ASHLEE SIMPSON WITH LOTS OF SKIPPED THERAPY.



46
JASON FORREST
THE UNRELENTING SONGS... SONG
 Disco-drag icon Sylvester hustles with the Who on a raucous hipster mixtape.



45
ASHLEE SIMPSON
AUTOBIOGRAPHY GEFFEN
 Jessica's li'l sis dyes her hair black, coos and snarls through a defiant debut.



44
TV ON THE RADIO
DESPERATE... TOUCH AND GO
 Arty skronk and soulfulness from Yeah Yeah Yeahs-affiliated Brooklyn hipsters.



43
REGINA SPEKTOR
SOVIET KITSCH SIRE
 Strokes' comrade and Russian-born pianist's kooky anti-folk is hilarious and sad.



42
ROOTS
THE TIPPING POINT GEFFEN
 Rap's finest band suck in their experimental gut for throwbacks and futurism.



41
KATY ROSE
BECAUSE I CAN V2
 Imagine Ashlee Simpson with a worse attitude and lots of skipped therapy sessions.



40
LLOYD BANKS
THE HUNGER FOR MORE INTERSCOPE
 50 Cent's wingman is even colder-blooded than his boss on this ruffneck set.



39
SONIC YOUTH
SONIC NURSE GEFFEN
 NYC noise doctors find room for melody — and a Mariah Carey dis track.



38
PJ HARVEY
UH HUH HER ISLAND
 On her seventh album, it's back to stark, lo-fi gloom for the mistress of mope.



37
NELLY
SWEAT UNIVERSAL
 On this party disc, Nelly coins a stripper dance and taps the NBA On NBC theme for maximum crunkosity.



36
MAGNETIC FIELDS
I NONESUCH
 Introspective, inventive indie-pop, brought to you by a droll lyricist and the letter, well, you know.



35
BJÖRK
MEDULLA ELEKTRA
 Iceland's favorite weirdo gets weirder with an a cappella set — instruments are sooo 2003.



34
BRIAN WILSON
SMILE NONESUCH
 Brian Wilson shakes off the meds and finishes an album that's been 38 years in the making.



33
ELLIOTT SMITH
SONGS FROM A BASEMENT... ANTI/EPITAPH
 Poignant, painfully hushed laments from the Portland suicide.



32
NANCY SINATRA
NANCY SINATRA SANCTUARY
 Pop's sexiest sexagenarian returns, with U2 and Morrissey polishing her boots.



31
SNOW PATROL
FINAL STRAW A&M
 On their major-label debut, Irish softies make like an indie-rock Coldplay.



30
COHEED AND CAMBRIA
IN KEEPING WITH THE SEASONS... COLUMBIA
 Prog-metal about spaceships, girls who aren't interested.



29
ANGERMUSE
THE GRAY ALBUM
 The band bigger than Jesus backs up the God MC in a Mouse-costumed beat-masher's bedroom.



28
THE GOOD LIFE
ALBUM OF THE YEAR SADDLE CREEK
 Cursive frontman Tim Kasher launches the year's wittiest diary of heartbreak.



27
MODEST MOUSE
GOOD NEWS FOR PEOPLE... EPIC
 Seattle depressives turn their frowns upside down and get poppy.



26
PRINCE
MUSICOLOGY NPG/COLUMBIA
 Meditations on loving God, hating politics and, er, exploring monogamy.



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ALL ABOUT MY YEAR

JIM ADKINS
JIMMY EAT WORLD

The cool uncle of emo

Best song I heard this year
Pernice Brothers' "Byte Side."**Biggest regret of 2004**

Accidentally giving myself second-degree burns on my entire left hand at a barbecue.

What I learned in 2004

Sometimes it's better to let a red-hot charcoal chimney just sit where it is.

Number of times in 2004 I said, "I'm Jim Adkins, bitch!"I've never said that, although I have quoted *Chappelle's Show* to many people on many occasions. I think I'm being quite funny, but I've probably ended up looking like an idiot.**Favorite phrase of 2004**

"Konichiwa, bitches!"

Where I'll spend New Year's EveI'd like to be in Chicago at the last Guided By Voices show. We're not playing on New Year's Eve unless it involves a *shitload* of money.**Drunkest I got in 2004**

I don't really remember. I think if you can remember, then you've really not been trying hard enough.

Jimmy Eat World:
How much farther
do we have to
push this thing?25
COURTNEY LOVE
AMERICA'S SWEETHEART

Tears, insults and a whole lotta Love on this bubble-grunge screed

She hasn't gotten any less kwaaaazy — drugs rarely cement people in reality. But somehow, between the many break-ups and break-ins, court appearances and cover shoots, she regained her inspiration. The album feels coughed up: come-ons and put-downs, kamikaze guitar riffs and battered drums, rage and threats smeared like lipstick on a takeout diner napkin. Still the queen bee of personality disorders.

24
TODD SNIDER
EAST NASHVILLE SKYLINE

A folk-country cut-up who gets a kick out of country folk

Todd Snider calls his neighborhood of East Nashville "the part of town people leave so their kids won't have to go to shitty schools." On his sixth album, he's a long way from Music Row: Despite the cowboy hat and dusty drawl, Snider's got more in common with "tree-huggin', peace-lovin', pot-smokin', bare-footin' hippies" than, say, Toby Keith. And luckily, unlike most hippies, he also knows how to laugh at himself.

23
JIMMY EAT
WORLD
FUTURES

Emo grows up, but keeps the girl trouble

Most emo skews to the dateless-to-the-prom set, but this band's fourth album carves a space between teen tantrums and midlife crises. Emo's million-dollar question — why? — becomes a quest for self-knowledge. "23" proves life doesn't get better just 'cause you can buy booze legally. Elsewhere, Jim Adkins turns his eye to break-ups and booty calls, enunciating every syllable even when he's howling his hooks.

22
THE HIVES
TYRANNO-SAURUS HIVES

Possibly the only Swedish garage band ever inspired by Kraftwerk

The Hives tear through songs like they hacked a rock-legend's database then stuck a fork in an electrical outlet. Their unstoppable third disc zooms through a new set of flourishes: pop glitter ("Walk Idiot Walk"), radio Clash ("A Little More for Little You"), bombast ("Diabolic Scheme"), even autobahn beats and flashes of a synth ("Love In Plaster"). *Blender* welcomes its new robot masters!

21
DRIVE-BY
TRUCKERS
THE DIRTY SOUTH

Book-smart drunkards get grim, grimmer, grimmest

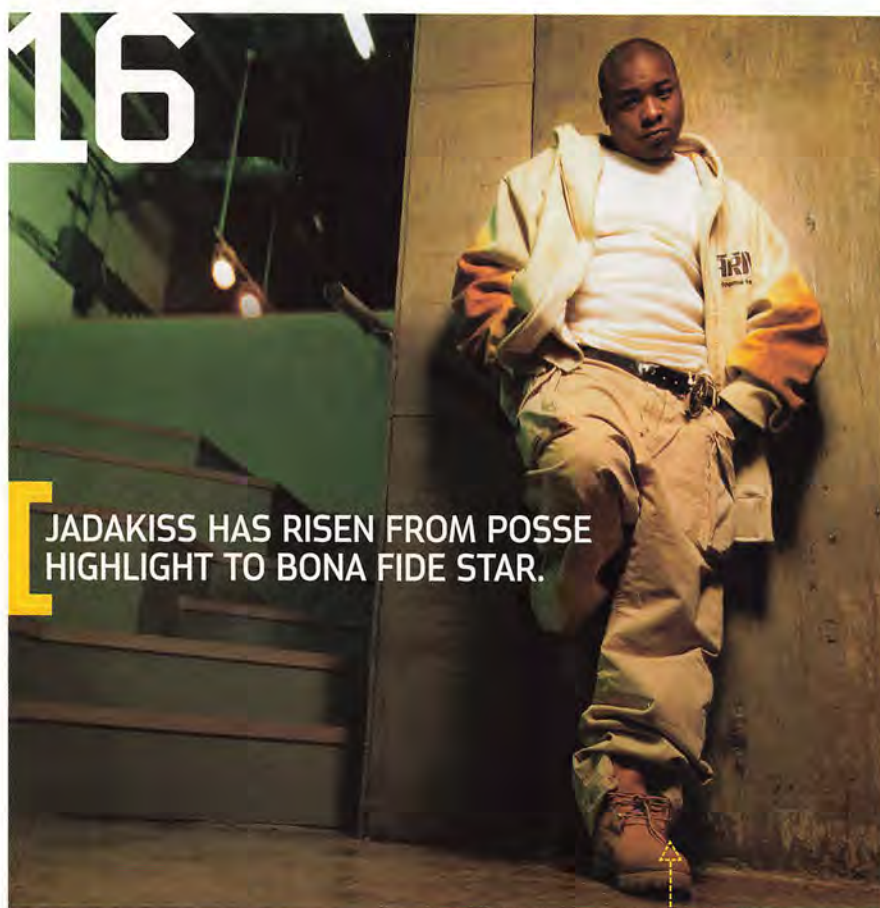
"Don't fuck with us — we'll burn your house down" warns the liner notes to the Truckers' fifth album. Such a fate would probably be a relief for *The Dirty South's* characters, who spend the vast majority of their time getting cancer or being swept away by tornadoes. But, thanks to their boozy verve and high standards of songwriting, meditations on death have rarely sounded livelier.

20
THE SECRET
MACHINES
NOW HERE IS NOWHERE

Music to take drugs to take the L train to

This Flaming Lips-approved Brooklyn trio boasts a rhythm section built like a linebacker: stocky, pummeling. They spray guitar and keyboard riffs across each song's surface like graffiti. "First Wave Intact" suggests a chopped-and-screwed version of Rush's "Tom Sawyer," while the racing "Nowhere Again" was on *The O.C.* The result is jumbo-sized stoner rock, tailor-made for adventures in the munchies.

16



JADAKISS HAS RISEN FROM POSSE HIGHLIGHT TO BONA FIDE STAR.



ALL ABOUT MY YEAR

JADAKISS

Stout MC with hip-hop's meanest voice

Best song I heard this year

Usher's "Yeah!"

Best sex I had this year

There's many experiences to choose from . . .

Number of times in 2004 I said,

"I'm Jadakiss, bitch!"

A million. Dave Chappelle got in on a smash!

In 2004 I was totally obsessed with

Money. And longevity. I wanna be here awhile.

Stupidest thing I bought in 2004

A mink coat. It cost me three, four thousand dollars, and I only wore it once.

My most rock-star moment of 2004

I had a party for the VMAs, and there were girls totally naked in the V.I.P. like it was nothing. They were ready to get even crazier, but I told 'em that was good enough.

Number of times I watched the

Paris Hilton sex tape

None, but I'm trying to get my hands on it now! I love Paris.

Where I'll spend New Year's Eve

I'll be in church givin' thanks to the Lord. I party all year, but that one night I go to church with my mom.



19 CAETANO VELOSO A FOREIGN SOUND

NONESUCH
All-covers album that sounds like the world's coolest iPod on shuffle

Who besides Brazil's tropicalismo master would have the *cojones* to cover Nirvana and Paul Anka on one disc? This cunning album strips down and seduces the songs of pop's brightest writers. The acoustic "Come As You Are" ripples like a pond, and DNA's freak-out "Detached" gets symphony treatment. Bolder still, Veloso renders Irving Berlin and Cole Porter standards almost new again.



18 THE LIBERTINES THE LIBERTINES

ROUGH TRADE
London's brightest stars get their act together — kinda

Over the last year, Pete Doherty has burglarized his bandmate's apartment, bailed on a Thai rehab center, and been photographed in *Blender* smoking crack. Brilliant songwriters, the Libertines frontmen are like Lennon and McCartney, had Paul McCartney stolen John Lennon's VCR to sell off for smack money. Somehow, Doherty found time for this careening set. It's partly funny and more than a bit tragic.



17 EAGLES OF DEATH METAL PEACE LOVE DEATH METAL

REKORDS/REKORDS/ANTACID/AUDIO
Pro-porn, pro-crystal-meth boogie

Jesse Hughes says he "went from being a single father and video-store clerk to a cock-swinging rock & roller" with the help of old pal Josh Homme, Queens of the Stone Age main man. As Homme plays simple, lean drumbeats, Hughes — a newborn metal star with trucker mustache and tattoos — slams distorted guitar riffs and howls catchy falsetto songs of corruption and cruelty.



16 JADAKISS KISS OF DEATH

RUFF RYDERS/INTERSCOPE
The "Bush knocked down the towers" guy

Known as J-to-the-mwah to fans unafraid to make kissy noises in public, Jadakiss has finally risen from his role as a posse highlight (the LOX, D-Block) and killer cameo supplier (J.Lo's "Jenny from the Block," Ghostface's "Run") to a bona fide star. On his second solo album, *Kiss of Death*, the Yonkers native is the epitome of New York battle-rhyming, rasping his way through more similes than a freshman-year short-story-writing workshop.



15 BEENIE MAN BACK TO BASICS

VIRGIN
Dancehall's self-proclaimed "grindacologist"

If you're not fluent in Jamaican patois and fear you're missing out on the deeper meanings of Beenie's singsong toasting, let us clue you in on his three main subjects: doing it, doing it and doing it well. Vibrant beats, off-color charm (he calls himself "the surgeon general" and nicknames his penis "Johnny") and playful affectations (he squeals "zagga zowl!" when he's excited) buoy *Back to Basics'* pussy-hound rhymes.



14 GRETCHEN WILSON HERE FOR THE PARTY

SONY NASHVILLE
SWF seeks whiskey, cowboys for good time

She may be the lone female in country stars Big & Rich's MuzikMafia posse, but she ain't no lady. The biggest thing ever to come out of PocaHontas, Illinois, guzzles booze ("When it Rains"), drag races through heaven ("Chariot") and threatens to kick a rival's "pretty little butt" ("Homewrecker"). With the white-trash girl-power anthem "Redneck Woman" she invites the rest of her Southern gals along.



ALL ABOUT MY YEAR

MIKE SKINNER THE STREETS

Booze-guzzling U.K. rap hero

Best song I heard this year

The Mitchell Brothers' "Routine Check."

What my iPod knows about me that you don't

That I have a fine collection of Kenny Rogers and Johnny Cash tunes.

Trend I'm most sick of

Trucker hats.

Biggest regret of 2004

Drinking too much.

Ambition for 2005

Drinking too much.

Drunkest I got in 2004

Cannes, at some festival. It's become known as "the lost weekend." Dark.

In 2004, I was totally obsessed with

Babyfoot (a European equivalent of foosball).

Most important thing I learned

Total control of the Babyfoot table, from goalie to defense to attack.

Number of times I watched the

Paris Hilton sex tape

Tape? Have you lot not heard of the Internet?



MIKE SKINNER DROPS
RHYMES LIKE A BRIT SEINFELD.

8



13 GHOSTFACE THE PRETTY TONEY ALBUM

DEF JAM

The Wu boy without the canceled sitcom makes good

In 1993, no one could have predicted Wu-Tang's most oblique member would be its torchbearer 11 years later. Built on '70s soul, looped and chopped into dazzling shapes, Ghost's fourth solo LP starts with a rant about banana Nutrament and ends with a breathless cop chase. Idiosyncratic and excitable, the man who wears bathrobes onstage has become one of rap's most unpredictable MCs.



12 SCISSOR SISTERS SCISSOR SISTERS

UNIVERSAL

As full of electro-pop and glam ballads as a night at Studio 54

They're gayer than Elton John's chandelier! In a year when even the straightest boys dressed like vicious queens, this dance-rock group clinched the rhinestone gold medal with their kinky tales of transvestites, drugs and backseat crushes. Sure, the second half of their debut is as thin as Mary-Kate Olsen's wrist. But the first half is highlighted by the staggering "Take Your Mama."



11 DIZZEE RASCAL SHOWTIME

XL/MATADOR

The toughest British musician alive

Dylan Mills has the most vibrant voice in rap. A maelstrom of sobs, machine-gun bursts and cold-blooded snarls, it's vivid and moving as he dispatches tale after tale of 'hood verité, East London edition. His 2003 debut, *Boy In da Corner*, announced that there was indeed such a thing as U.K. thugs. On this follow-up, the since-stabbed Dizzee sets himself against sparer beats, allowing his impressive wordplay to take centerstage.



10 WILCO A GHOST IS BORN

NONESUCH

Jeff Tweedy's head: terrible place to live, great place to visit

The fact that Wilco's latest is essentially *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot Mk II* seems more than excusable given the huge sonic leap the onetime alt-country-ers made with that CD. The songs are every bit as good here — even the 10-minute-plus "Spiders (Kidsmoke)," a meditation on tax return-obsessed arachnids, seems a little on the short side. Less obliquely, "Handshake Drugs" is, indeed, about drugs.



9 NELLIE MCKAY GET AWAY FROM ME

COLUMBIA

This manic redhead bursts with imagination

In truth, she's 22 — not 19, as she claimed to *Blender* and others. Well, autobiographical lies are a sign of ambition in rock, and on her debut, McKay nearly explodes with grandiose verve. In tricked-up pop songs full of twisty horns and startling rhymes, she's sprightly and sarcastic, full of love for animals and hatred for people (especially people who eat animals). Think of her as Eminem in red lipstick, with a jazz piano instead of a mic.



8 THE STREETS A GRAND DON'T COME FOR FREE

VICE/ATLANTIC

Britain's most popular B-boy, right after Ali G

Mike Skinner rhymes conversationally about DVD late fees, overanalyzing text messages and a host of other daily nothings: He's like Jerry Seinfeld reborn as a contemplative twentysomething Brit. His second album traces a continuous narrative built around a search for lost cash, winding through territory both comic (the snotty-girl tell-off "Fit But You Know It") and emotionally ripe ("Blinded By the Lights").

A steal at **\$19.99***

"Best Action Game"

—Spike TV Video Game Awards

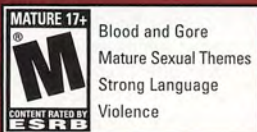


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ALL ABOUT MY YEAR

ALEX KAPRANOS
FRANZ FERDINAND

Scotland's charming punk playboy

Best song I heard this year

The Blood Arm's "Do I Have Your Attention?" They're a wee band from L.A., and it's totally wonderful.

What my iPod knows about me that you don't

It always plays Black Sabbath, Deep Purple and Led Zeppelin. Maybe I'm a closet rocker.

Trend I'm most sick of

Vertical stripes. It's horizontal now, baby!

Where I'll spend New Year's Eve

In the Scottish Highlands with some very close friends and a shot of whiskey.

My most expensive purchase of the year

I bought a used Mercedes for about \$700. Quite rusty. That's about as far as I go in terms of bling, I'm afraid.

Sex symbol of 2004

Eleanor Friedberger of the Fiery Furnaces. I've got a big crush on her.

What would you give Britney and Kevin as a wedding present?

Water pistols. Some of the best presents are the least appropriate ones.

FRANZ FERDINAND'S WAS THE
YEAR'S FINEST ROCK DEBUT.

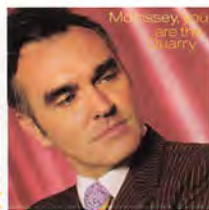
7

ALICIA KEYS
THE DIARY OF
ALICIA KEYS

J RECORDS

Grammy-winning keyboardist invents Cinemascope soul

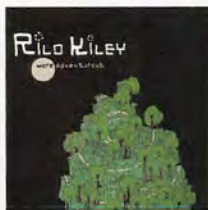
As a prodigy, she seemed slight, but her debut was flat and safe. Here, restarting with production from Timbaland and Kanye West, she's more excited and current ("Heartburn"), and more classic and lush. The singles "You Don't Know My Name" and "If I Ain't Got You" bring back the romanticized laments of '70s soul that Keys absorbed growing up in New York City's rough-hewn neighborhoods.



6

MORRISSEY
YOU ARE THE
QUARRYSANCTUARY
After seven years, Moz and his perfect coif return

Since his last album, most fans had given up on him. The 45-year-old had exiled himself to L.A., seemingly content to spend his days with Nancy Sinatra sipping tea. But, as Franz Ferdinand and the Killers acknowledged their debt to his band, the Smiths, Morrissey reemerged with a new album as good as his solo work. Here, his voice is mellifluous, his song titles are hilarious, his mood is defiant and his timing is impeccable.



5

RILO KILEY
MORE
ADVENTUROUS

BRUTE/BEAUTE

A dazzling fourth album from L.A.'s kid-actors-turned-indie-pinups

Without Jenny Lewis, Rilo Kiley are just three more Saddle Creek shemps playing emotionally fragile folk-pop. With her, they're a revelation. Lewis's odes to lovers past and future, sung in a voice as soft and rich as angel-food cake, cut to the heart and stay there. "Portions for Foxes" is the sexiest tearjerker of the year. Attention record-store geeks: Your dream girl has arrived.



4

USHER
CONFESSIONS

ARISTA

Breaking up with Chilli and hooking up with Lil Jon: good career move!

Before his fourth album, Usher Raymond had already sold millions. But it wasn't until Lil Jon pumped him full of crunk juice that Usher realized his full potential as a pop-dominating booty maestro, selling 1.1 million copies the first week out. In addition to the year's rowdiest club single, Usher writhed his way through his hugest slow jam to date, the baby-mama-drama masterpiece "Confessions Pt. II."



3

LORETTA LYNN
VAN LEAR ROSE

INTERSCOPE

Butcher's Hollow meets Detroit Rock City; excellence ensues

The year's best country album, or its best garage-rock album? Both. This near-perfect collaboration between Lynn, who wrote and sang the songs, and Jack White, who produced and arranged them, weds the White Stripes' galloping blues to the coal miner's daughter's sloe-gin drawl. Part May-December love letter ("Portland, Oregon") and part life story ("Little Red Shoes"), it's Lynn's finest in years.



2

FRANZ FERDINAND
FRANZ FERDINAND

EPIC

The one band Scottish dance-rock invasion!

This Glasgow fop squad knows the cardinal rule of body-movin': never drop the beat. From the moment "Jacqueline" breaks into a loping celebration of joblessness, to the masochistic pleas of the hit "Take Me Out," to the gay disco fantasy "Michael," the year's finest rock debut pumps along on an infectious four-on-the-floor pulse. Presiding is singer Alex Kapranos: an affable, incurable flirt.

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Around the Sun



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Gold Medal



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Antics



The Postal Service
Give Up



Beastie Boys
To the 5 Boroughs



Muse
Absolution



The Prodigy
Always Outnumbered, Never Outgunned



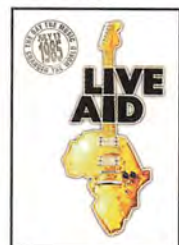
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Alive at Last



Nirvana
Nirvana Box Set



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ALBUM OF THE YEAR



KANYE WEST
THE COLLEGE DROPOUT
COLUMBIA



In 2004, all rapper-producer Kanye West did was breathe new life into hip-hop, make pink the new black, and get Jesus on MTV. His typically modest goal for 2005? "Sell a million the first week!"

BY WILLIAM SHAW
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEFF RIEDEL

THE WILD, WILD WEST

HEY KANYE: *What's the best thing about hip-hop in 2004?*

"Uh" He pauses. Like that's a really dumb question. "Me."

And the worst?

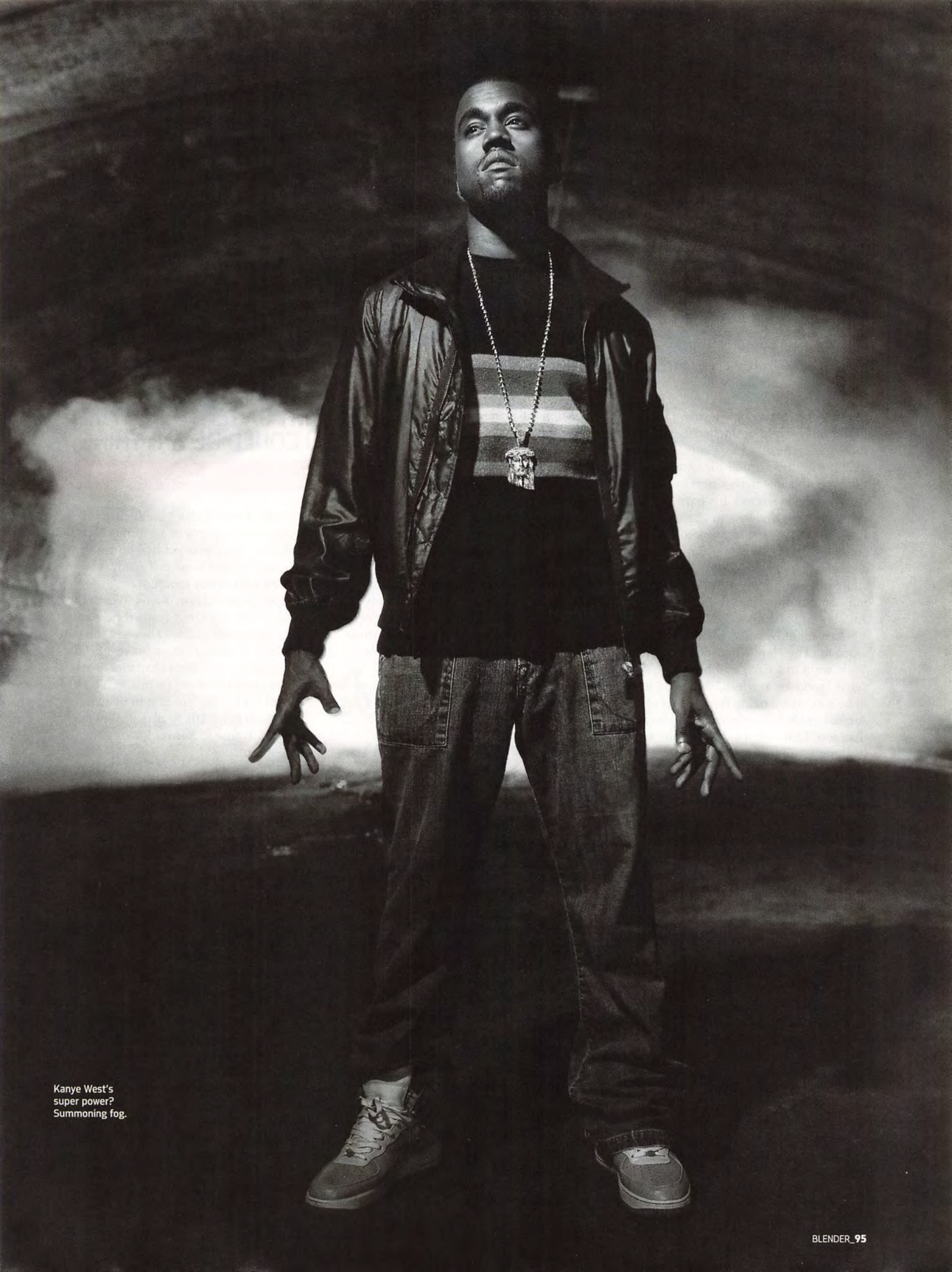
"Hmm. The critics that hate when I give that type of answer."

Pleased with his response, Kanye West laughs. He loves those kinds of snappy *bon mots*, the way it's going to read on the page. After all, why shouldn't he talk like that? The headlines about him read: "Arrogant Rapper or Musical Genius?" Kanye acts like he doesn't understand the need for the "or."

"You know," he says, "my family always says shy is stupid. Like, speak up!"

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

KANYE WEST DOESN'T mind speaking up. He is irrepressibly full of himself. And whether you like him telling you or not, *The College Dropout* really is the best album of 2004. →



Kanye West's
super power?
Summoning fog.

First off, it sounds great. As a producer, West has a way with a beat. We knew that from West-produced hits like Jay-Z's "Izzo (H.O.V.A.)" before he'd ever rapped on record. He lifts old soul licks and makes them sound like they were always meant to be beats. And then there are his sit-up-and-notice-me signature tricks, like speeding up vocal loops to Minnie-Mouse pitch, as on his breakthrough hit, "Through the Wire."

Second, it's about personality. West is witty, vibrant and doesn't quite fit the picture of what hip-hop's supposed to be. In hip-hop, you're either about bling 'n' blunts or you're a beat-crazed backpacker; ghetto thug or politically aware urbanite.

West doesn't want to choose. He never hides the fact he's a Chicago-raised middle-class child of intellectuals. But like most males, he also has a sneaking fascination with the grimmer life. And admitting to both sides makes him the most vibrant rapper around. It's hard to resist someone who rhymes, on "Breathe In, Breathe Out," "First nigga with a Benz and a backpack/Ice chain, Cardi lens and a knapsack/Always said if I rapped I'd say somethin' significant/But now I'm rappin' 'bout money, hos and rims again/ And it's still about the Benjamins."

Last night he finished editing the video to "The New Workout Plan" in New York, went to a party and hung out with some "good-ass models." No doubt about it, he's enjoying being famous. As of August 30, he's been single, and loving that, too. That was the day he split with his long-term girlfriend.

"The thing is," he says, "I *always* had a girlfriend. Now it's like some property opening up on the beach that no one could get into until now."

It's West's year in heaven all around. The genre-busting *College Dropout* is hitting triple-platinum, touching the kind of audience only OutKast can claim. He's made hip-hop's oldest also-ran Twista a star with "Slow Jamz." To top it all, R&B's sisterhood have anointed him a modern Berry Gordy: After working on Alicia Keys's last album, he's also produced swinging, sophisticated tracks for Janet Jackson and Brandy. Mariah's just asked him for a song. He obliged.

Today he flew to Minneapolis, where he's playing another arena show with Usher. Kanye and *Blender* are in his dressing room where he's preparing to go onstage.

He doesn't even *look* like a rapper is supposed to, with his preppy close-



"For the last time, the restrooms are over there!"

cropped haircut and Versace sweater. He picks his clothes with care. Alongside hip-hop fop Fransworth Bentley, West has become the posterboy for what's being referred to as "the gentlemen's fashion movement." He doesn't believe in dressing down. He buys so much Polo he hasn't had a chance to wear most of it yet. Clothes make him happy. "I thank God for having good taste," he declares.

Bounding onstage, he is ebullient. As you'd expect, his performance is as carefully produced and thought-out as his records. He's backed by DJ A-Trak on turntables and keyboardist John Legend, who is signed to West's production company. Behind them, videos play continually. For the last number, the hip-hop

WEST IS IRREPRESSIBLY FULL OF HIMSELF. "MY PARENTS TOLD ME I COULD DO ANYTHING."

spiritual "Jesus Walks," he ditches the Versace and appears in an immaculate white suit, the flames of hell burning onscreen behind him, as if ready to swallow him at any moment.

The song is classic Kanye West: Why shouldn't he rap about Jesus if he wants? And that second verse, "They say you can rap about anything except for Jesus/That means guns, sex, lies, videotapes/But if I talk about God my record won't get played? *Huh?*" He put that in deliberately, he says, to taunt DJs to play it. Which they did. Game to Kanye. Making the uncool cool.

★★★★★

BACKSTAGE, WEST'S MANAGER reminds him that tomorrow he's scheduled to visit Dwight D. Eisenhower High, in Blue Island, Illinois. The school suggested that students write an essay on West; maybe he could pick the best?

"What?" smiles West. "They think I'm so much of an egoist I want to read 50 essays about myself?" West has what psychologists call a sense of entitlement. Maybe it's because he was an only child.

His mother, Donda West, was an English professor at Chicago State. (Not any more, though. Kanye just signed her up to his production team.) His father is a marriage counselor with two Masters degrees. Early on, Kanye outed him as a former Black Panther, somewhat to his respectable father's embarrassment. Kanye's parents split when he was 3, and though he's close with both, it was his doting mother who raised him. "Basically, my parents told me I could do anything."

Just as it does today, his self-confidence was elevated a few notches. In →

ALL ABOUT MY YEAR

KANYE WEST

Producer/rapper/survey-filler-outer extraordinaire!

Favorite CD of 2004

Franz Ferdinand's *Franz Ferdinand*.

Least favorite song of 2004

Kanye West, "Breathe In, Breathe Out."

Trend I'm most sick of

Videos with mansions, fancy cars and model chicks way finer than the girls you went to school with.

Best sex I had in 2004

With my girl on vacation in Hawaii.

Drunkest I got in 2004

Backstage after the World Music Awards in Las Vegas.

My most expensive purchase in 2004

The painting I commissioned from Ernie Barnes.

I'm totally obsessed with

My new Apple G4.

Ambition for 2005

To make G.O.O.D. music.



With Mom at 2004 BET Awards.

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GET LOST. FIND YOURSELF.

kindergarten, a teacher pulled his mom aside, telling her archly: "Kanye has no problems with self esteem, does he?"

"The thing is, would you rather I had problems with self esteem?" he demands, popping a pistachio. "Often in the black community, people would rather you walk around with your head hanging."

He wasn't cut out for the intellectual life. He's too hyper. "I can't even read that well," he admits. "Reading is just so boring to me. My only problem was my attention span. Look at me now." West's a fidget — physically and intellectually. His concentration is goldfish-like. One minute he's wide-eyed with excitement about a video concept he's drawn up, the next he's theorizing about why black girls are prissy about giving head when white ones aren't.

West was smart enough to be awarded an art scholarship to Chicago State, but studying didn't suit him. Never one to blame himself, he blames the system. Hence, *The College Dropout*.

On tracks like "We Don't Care," "Get Em High" and "School Spirit," he mocks an education system that harbors low expectations of African American students, saddles them with debt and then lets them loose in a world where there aren't enough jobs to go around.

"They say, 'Go to school and your life will be perfect,'" he says. "I'm not sayin', 'Don't go to school.' But if you do go, know that you still have to make decisions for yourself. It's not just 'Get straight As and your life will be happy ever after.'"

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

HERE'S ANOTHER REASON college was pretty dull for West: By the time he arrived, he was well on the way to becoming a big-name producer. He'd been working on tracks in his room since he was 15. At 20, he sold his first major beat to Jermaine Dupri for *Life in 1472*; just months later, he had a track on *The Movement*, from Mase's Harlem World project.

But what he really wanted to do was rap. "Yeah, I was just doin' beats to be able to pay for jewelry and leather coats and shit like that," he says. For two years, no one believed the college dropout could rap, but West didn't let that stand in his way. "First time I was in the studio with Jay, I rapped for him. First time with Mase. I would rap for anybody."

Finally, in 2002, Damon Dash signed him to Roc-A-Fella. And then disaster struck. He'd been awake too long, working in the studio on Beanie Sigel tracks, when he fell asleep at the wheel of his ride, hitting an oncoming car.

"Think about having your shit broken in three places. That can wake somebody up," he says. "The shit hit me right here."



With Jay-Z
at the 2004
MTV VMAs.

He points to the spot on his jaw where the steering wheel mashed his face. He moves his hand up a few of inches. "What if it hit me right here?" he wonders.

West believes that inch difference was a miracle, that he was saved by angels. Not only did it confirm his long-held belief that he was being preserved by God for something special, it also gave West a backstory. Until then, he'd been just a successful, middle-class producer. Now, he had the sort of life-and-death narrative a rapper needs to

"HAVING YOUR JAW BROKEN IN THREE PLACES? THAT CAN WAKE SOMEBODY UP."

underpin his lyrics. "I feel you can have a lot of good things to say, but no one's going to hear it unless I make you interested," he says.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

WEST COMES OFFSTAGE a second time dressed in a chartreuse Polo shirt with the *College Dropout* logo embroidered on it. He's just done a cameo on Usher's "Confessions" to help wind up the show.

The crowd spills out onto the Minneapolis streets. Three pretty girls wearing short skirts stand on the corner of First Avenue handing out flyers for Club 360. A white van with darkened windows drives along slowly. Just past them, it pulls over. A young guy jumps out and hollers at the girls. He tells them Kanye West is in the van. That Kanye wants to talk to them. Yeah. Sure. But when they look inside the van, there's West, sitting back, out of sight of the crowds.



Watch your backs, Regis and Kelly! Performing with Brandy at the 2004 BET Awards

"What you doin'?" he says, smiling broadly at them. He invites them back to his hotel. Earlier he'd explained, "I'm not out there trying to have sex with a lot of people. More just . . . having a fun time."

The girls hover by the door, uncertain, then decline.

The white van continues its troll. West's manager insists he shouldn't go out by himself, so Kanye's wardrobe man is doing the talking. But the moment is passing. The crowds are thinning. Impatient, West yells, "Wait up," and jumps out to talk to a couple of skimpily dressed women waiting to cross the street. "Hey!"

"Hi!" they say, smiling back.

West knows something is wrong. His face falls. He jumps back in the van and tells the driver: "Go! Go!"

"Damn," West's manager says. "They was *bogus*!"

"Never trust tall bitches," West complains. "They had big titties and everything." They were not women at all, West mutters to himself. "I got to get a girlfriend again."

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

HE'S LOOKING FORWARD to completing his next album. It will be bigger, he promises — better.

"What are your chances for the next album?" he riffs, pretending to be an interviewer. Then, loudly: "I'm planning to sell a million in the first week! This shit is planned out." *The College Dropout* sold 440,000 copies in its first week. "I wanted to do 500! I was," he admits, "a little bit disappointed."

He tries to picture what it'll be like when the acclaim stops, when he falls off. "But if you build your legacy," he promises, "you'll have it forever."

He bids goodbye, laughs about the transvestites, then mutters, "Do not write about that."

Then, with a small smile, "I'm not stupid. I know you will . . ." [BLENDER]



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27

ASHLEE SIMPSON
"PIECES OF ME"



THE 100 BEST SONGS OF 2004

Blender presents the tunes that had us strutting our stuff, banging our heads and humming to ourselves like Thorazine addicts. Plus... the 10 that had us praying for death.

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100 PRINCE

"CINNAMON GIRL" NPG/COLUMBIA
The synthesizers are pure '80s, the choogling pure '70s, and the sexed-up rasp pure Prince.

99 EAGLES OF DEATH METAL

"I ONLY WANT YOU" ANTACID/AUDIO
Mean-spirited boogie about the pleasures of noncommittal sex and hurting someone else's feelings.

98 !!!

"PARDON MY FREEDOM"

TOUCH AND GO

Dirty-mouthed Brooklynites say, "F the motherfucking C-C" over a vicious disco beat.

97 DOGS DIE IN HOT CARS

"I LOVE YOU 'CAUSE I HAVE TO" V2

Happy Scottish ska-punk, clearly not about the happiest relationship on earth.

96 DEM FRANCHIZE BOYZ

"WHITE TEES" UNIVERSAL

These Dirty South upstarts rap like they've got shares in Fruit of the Loom.

95 RATATAT

"17 YEARS" XL

Bass-guitar/laptop noodlers make like Iron Maiden jamming with the Neptunes.

94 THE CURE

"THE END OF THE WORLD" GEFEN

Robert Smith shakes off his gloom for a moment, revisiting the romantic joy of "Just Like Heaven."

93 INTERPOL

"SLOW HANDS" MATADOR

The natty NYC mopes kick out an anxious new-wave jam.

92 COCK LOUGE

"COCK IN THE PUSSY" TUBBY'S

Imagine John Mayer on a 72-hour porno binge. But dirtier.

91

THE DONNAS
"FALL BEHIND ME"

ATLANTIC

WHAT IT SOUNDS LIKE:

A vicious backhand slap to the heavily made-up face of a talentless pop star, powered by Donna A's disgusted sneer.

DONNA R, GUITARIST, SAYS:

"A lot of people think it's about being pissed off at a guy. But it's just about coming out ahead of someone for the right reasons."

AMAZING FACT: While the Donnas were recording their album, the cast of VH1's *The Surreal Life* — including Brigitte Nielsen, Jordan Knight and Flavor Flav — dropped by the studio for a visit.



90 TV ON THE RADIO

"STARING AT THE SUN" TOUCH AND GO

Art-rock about sex and tragedy.

89 PIXIES

"AIN'T THAT PRETTY AT ALL"

ARTEMIS

2004's best comeback act pays feedback-heavy tribute to Warren Zevon.

88 N.E.R.D.

"SHE WANTS TO MOVE" VIRGIN

"Her ass is a spaceship I wanna ride," Pharrell Williams drools on this tribal psychedelic jam.

87 ART BRUT

"POPULAR CULTURE"

ROUGH TRADE

These smarty-punks' brags make Jay-Z sound as modest as Norah Jones.

86 THE GOOD LIFE

"ALBUM OF THE YEAR" SADDLE CREEK

An unlikely romance sparks over booze and vomit in the ladies' room — and pretty much goes downhill from there.



85 PHANTOM PLANET

"BIG BRAT" EPIC

These O.C. themesters get their post-punk on.

84 BLONDE REDHEAD

"ELEPHANT WOMAN" 4AD

Pixie-voiced Kazu Makino coos about bottomless love.

83 FAITHLESS

"MASS DESTRUCTION" COLUMBIA

A wizened Brit speed-raps about how way too many people wanna blow up the world.

82 A.C. NEWMAN

"MIRACLE DRUG" MATADOR

Seventies-flavored power-pop that lurches and sashays on a stop-and-start rhythm.

81 LCD SOUNDSYSTEM

"YEAH" (CRASS VERSION) DFA

This hipster dance track lays down vicious acid house that squelches across a gulping bassline.

80 R.E.M.

"LEAVING NEW YORK" WARNER BROS.

Remembrance of 9/11, softly couched as break-up woe.

79 MASE

"WELCOME BACK" BAD BOY/UNIVERSAL

The Mushmouth King returns with this bouncy ode to clean livin'.

78 COURTNEY LOVE

"SUNSET STRIP" VIRGIN

L.A. decadence and killer highs followed by all-consuming despair.

77 T.O.K.

"GAL YOU A LEAD" VP

Boy bands are back — and they're Jamaican!

76 FABOLOUS

"BREATHE" DESERT STORM/ATLANTIC

Most rappers are after booty. Here, the rapper also known as John Jackson is out for... lungs?

75 MAROON 5

"THIS LOVE" J RECORDS

Yoyoing romance angst from the year's breakout alt-smoothies.

74 THE SECRET MACHINES

"FIRST WAVE INTACT" REPRISE

Nine glorious minutes of block-rocking drums and Rush-inspired wails.

73 COHEED AND CAMBRIA

"A FAVOR HOUSE ATLANTIC"

COLUMBIA

Emo meets Dungeons & Dragons with this Kingston, New York, foursome.

72 J-KWON

"TIPSY" SO SO DEF/ARISTA

If you're underage and wasted clap your hands!

71 T.I.

"RUBBER BAND MAN" ATLANTIC

The biggest single of this Dirty Southerner's career rides an ecstatic synth loop and name-checks the Taliban. Then he went to jail.

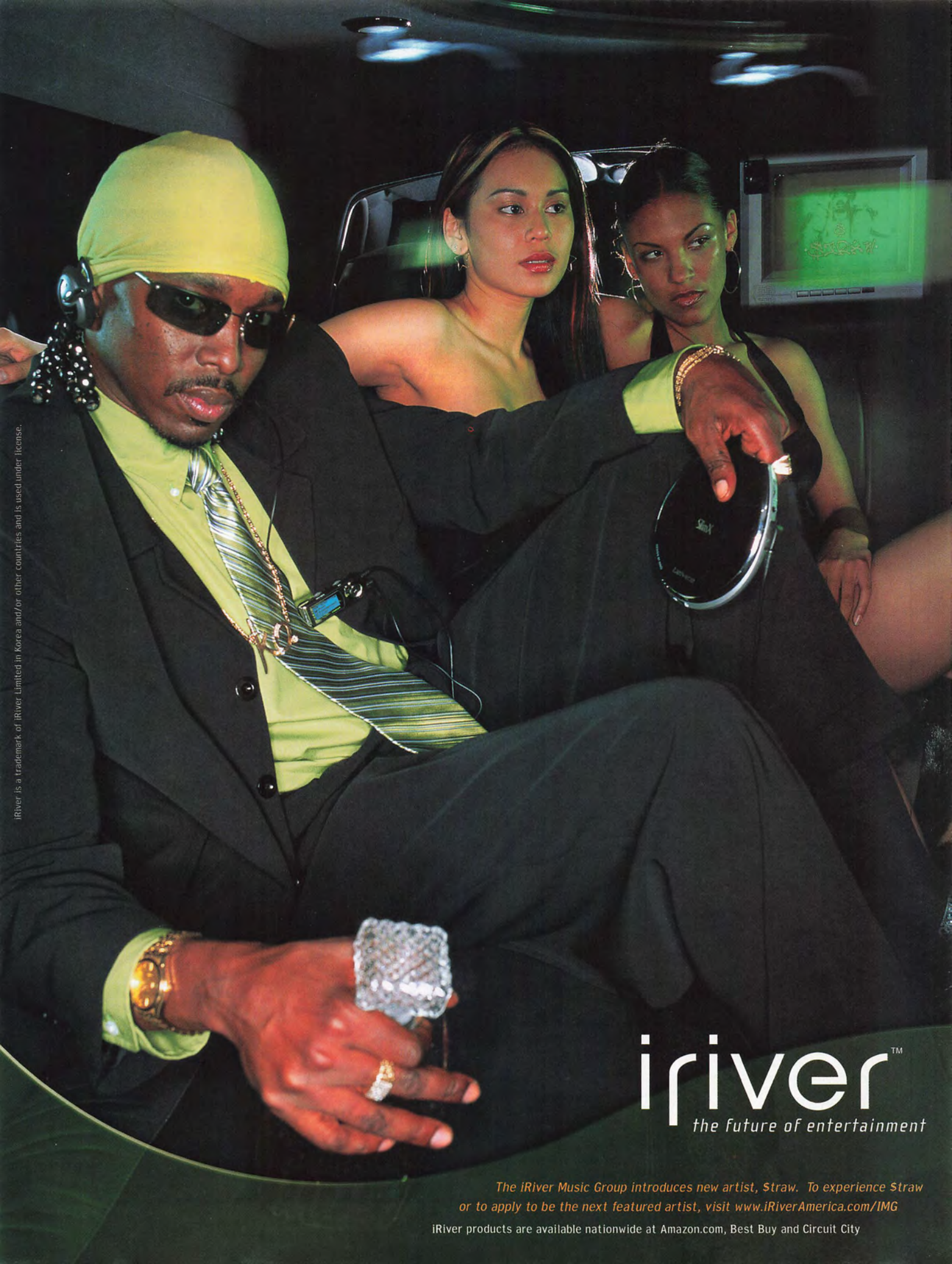


70

JET
"ARE YOU GONNA BE MY GIRL"

ELEKTRA

Aussie retro team wrangles groupies, sweats Jack Daniel's.



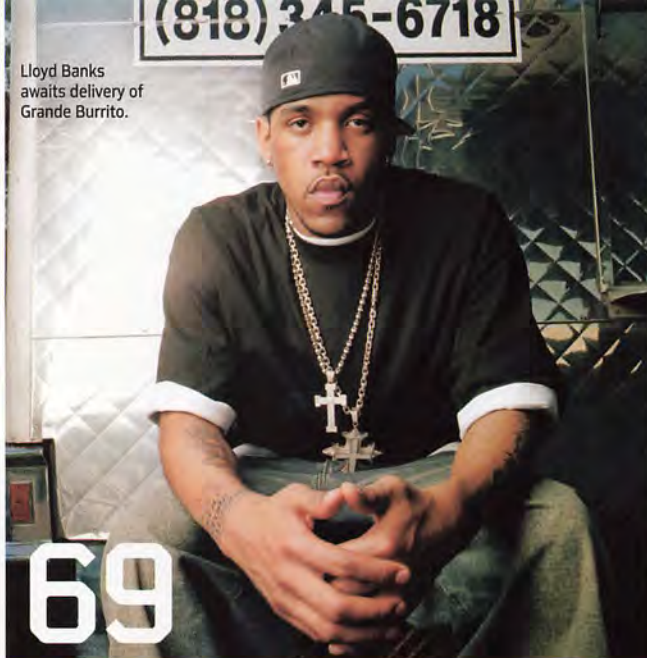
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Lloyd Banks
awaits delivery of
Grande Burrito.



69

LLOYD BANKS

"ON FIRE" G-UNIT/INTERSCOPE

WHAT IT SOUNDS LIKE: A party in da club while the roof goes up in flames.

LLOYD BANKS SAYS: "I wrote both verses in about 15 minutes and recorded it in 15 minutes. Me and 50 [Cent] just looked at each other like, 'This is it.'"

AMAZING FACT: Banks records all his singles, including "On Fire," at a studio in London, because it gives him more "creative space."



100 BEST SONGS OF 2004

68 GREEN DAY

"AMERICAN IDIOT" REPRISE
Inside every punk screaming at the world is an idealist trying to save it.

67 THE WALKMEN

"THE RAT" STARTIME
From these NYC fancy boys, a Strokes-y snarl at one big, bad, backstabbing mo'fo.

66 WILEY

"PIES" XL
Gluttonous hip-hop brags sound like the hippest Entenmann's commercial ever.

65 SNOOP DOGG FEAT. LIL JON

"STEP YO GAME UP" GEFEN
Snoop laces Lil Jon's crunk-NRG hysterics with a low, smoldering rap.

64 THE THERMALS

"OUR TRIP" SUB POP
An eyebrow-singeing, fuck-the-rules-let's-rock battle cry.

63 BEN KWELLER

"THE RULES" RCA
Driving blues-rock about slackers and the girls who wanna save 'em.

62 MORRISSEY

"FIRST OF THE GANG TO DIE" ATTACK/SANCTUARY
Stunning wordplay and street-crime imagery from the master of miserabilism.

61 AVRIL LAVIGNE

"MY HAPPY ENDING" RCA
Another day, another romance gone sour.

60 LIL' FLIP

"GAME OVER" COLUMBIA
The Houston sizzurp-sipper who made Pac-Man bleeps crunk.

59 WILCO

"SPIDERS (KIDSMOKE)" NONESUCH
Jeff Tweedy finds the menacing in the mundane.

58 THE VINES

"RIDE" CAPITOL
Craig Nicholls wants to burn down the world. But first he wants a date.

57 G-UNIT

"WANNA GET 2 KNOW U" INTERSCOPE
50 & co. aren't the types to lick their wounds. That's what hos are for.



THE 10 WORST SONGS OF 2004

Moronic! Derivative! And even worse . . . inspirational!

10 LIMPBIKIT

"BEHIND BLUE EYES" INTERSCOPE

It's never nice to kick a man whose career is on life-support, but did the world really need to hear about Fred Durst's persecution complex?

9 JET

"COLD HARD BITCH" ELEKTRA

We'll pound beers with them any time, but this is less a song than an SNL sketch, where a studied bar band paint on leather bellbottoms and howl about mean girls who won't come back to their hotel.

8 JOSS STONE

"FELL IN LOVE WITH A BOY"

S-CURVE

Slack interpretation of a White Stripes classic sets comically breathy vocals to basslines plucked from softcore porn. And not in a good way.

7 BLACK EYED PEAS

"LET'S GET IT STARTED"

INTERSCOPE

It's hard to "disconnect from all intellect and let the rhythm affect" when an MC with capri pants and Princess Leia hair is hurling some of the clumsiest rhymes since Vanilla Ice at you.

6 JOSH GROBAN

"YOU RAISE ME UP" WARNER BROS.

Inspirational hit that sounds stitched from scraps of Céline Dion and the *Lion King* soundtrack. Makes "Wind Beneath My Wings" sound like the Ramones.

5 FIVE FOR FIGHTING

"100 YEARS" COLUMBIA

In an extremely unpleasant falsetto, John Ondrasik spins off trite *carpe diem* life lessons that would fit perfectly over the closing credits of any Lifetime original broadcast.

4 TOBY KEITH

"WHISKEY GIRL" DREAMWORKS

Since you were wondering, this red-state icon's perfect woman wears blue jeans, scorns champagne and makes no fuss about her hair. Which is all clichéd and fine, but when he leers about her '69 Mustang and says, "I like 'em rough," it's like listening to some 'roid-fueled braggart in a football locker room. Call it shock and ewww.

3 EAMON

"FUCK IT (I DON'T WANT YOU BACK)" JIVE

Granted, there's an amount of moron genius required to turn "Fuck you, you ho" into a pop hook, but this Staten Island goomba makes you feel cripplingly sorry for his ex.

2 NICKELBACK

"FIGURED YOU OUT" ROADRUNNER

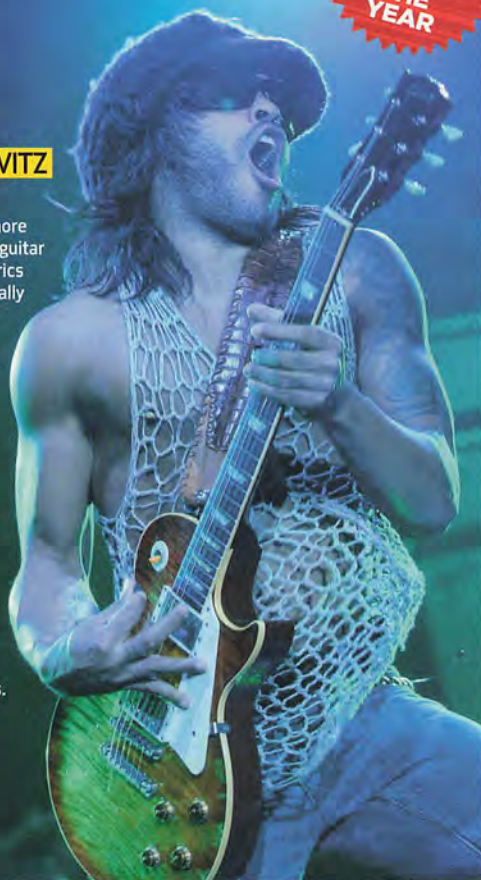
Fellas, if you ever meet a girl who is kind enough to ignore your goatee and hemp necklace and perform fellatio on you, the least you can do is avoid gloating about the dirt on her knees and calling her your "favorite damn disease."

1

LENNY KRAVITZ

"LADY" VIRGIN

The only things more wooden than the guitar playing are the lyrics (yep, Kravitz actually rhymes "she's so fine" with "she blows my mind"). But the worst song of the year couldn't have made it to the top without the help of that ubiquitous tie-in Gap commercial, in which rock's silliest peacock meets Sarah Jessica Parker in a car-wreck of flared jeans and warmed-over riffs.



THE
MOST
HORRIBLE
TUNE OF
THE
YEAR

Clockwise, from top left: Karm Canikdols; Danielle Levitt/Corbis Outline; Rob Cabel/F1

skinny dip





56

BEASTIE BOYS
"CH-CHECK IT OUT" CAPITOL

Prime whiteboy rap, with some gray at the edges.

55 HOOBASTANK

"THE REASON" ISLAND

A heartfelt love song perfect for prom DJs everywhere.

54 BRANDY FEAT. KANYE WEST

"TALK ABOUT OUR LOVE" ATLANTIC

A united R&B front against gossip folks and cockblockers.

53 GHOSTFACE FEAT. JADAKISS

"RUN" DEF JAM

Spaghetti Western howls heighten the drama in this cop-chase freakout.

52 MY CHEMICAL ROMANCE

"I'M NOT OK (I PROMISE)" REPRISE

A bizarre love triangle, screamo-style.

51 CIARA FEAT. PETEY PABLO

"GOODIES" LA FACE

The whistling beat's so irresistible you can forgive the booty-as-baked-goods metaphor.

50 JADAKISS

FEAT. ANTHONY HAMILTON

"WHY" RUFF RYDERS/INTERSCOPE

"What's Going On" for the hip-hop generation.

49 MARIO WINANS

"I DON'T WANNA KNOW" UNIVERSAL

R&B lothario turns down the Barry White, cranks the Dashboard Confessional.

48 BEENIE MAN FEAT. MS. THING

"DUDE" VIRGIN

He'll do 'em in a van and tie 'em to a fan.

47 MOBB DEEP

"GOT IT TWISTED" JIVE

So tough they kill in front of their kids. So gangsta they sample Thomas Dolby.

46 KANYE WEST

FEAT. SYLEENA JOHNSON

"ALL FALLS DOWN" ROC-A-FELLA

The moral? Beneath every Louis Vuitton monogram lies a fragile ego.

45 WOLFMAN AND

PETE DOHERTY

"FOR LOVERS" ROUGH TRADE

The Libertines' rehab troller gets surprisingly sweet.

44 THE ROOTS

"DON'T SAY NUTHIN'" GEFFEN

The best garbled hook since "Work It."

43

VANESSA CARLTON

"WHITE HOUSES" INTERSCOPE

A bittersweet coming-of-age narrative, from Spin the Bottle to summer nookie.

42 PJ HARVEY

"WHO THE FUCK" ISLAND

A glorious mess of garage-punk sludge and pissed-off snarls.

41 THE HIVES

"WALK IDIOT WALK" INTERSCOPE

A garage rave-up about a new Swedish dance craze (or conformist automatons).

40 LIL JON AND THE
EAST SIDE BOYZ

"WHAT YOU GON' DO" TVT

The crunk version of WWE Smackdown.

39 M.I.A.

"GALANG" XL

Deliciously confounding dancehall-electro.

37 ALICIA KEYS

"YOU DON'T KNOW MY NAME"

J RECORDS

Keys longs for her crush over cascading Philly soul.

36 D12

"MY BAND" SHADY/INTERSCOPE

Eminem and co. ponder the inequities of fame, dressing rooms and groupie love.

35 GRETCHEN WILSON

"REDNECK WOMAN" SONY NASHVILLE

An empowering big-up to the down-home girls who choose Coors over class any day.

34 KANYE WEST

"THROUGH THE WIRE" ROC-A-FELLA

This fender-bender jam launched rap's hottest new star: Getting shot nine times is so 2003.

33 THE LIBERTINES

"CAN'T STAND ME NOW"

ROUGH TRADE

Good-times rock so freewheeling you can smell the beer on its breath.

32 CAM'RON FEAT. JAHEIM

"LORD YOU KNOW"

DIPLOMATS/ROC-A-FELLA

Surprisingly moving gangsta tales from this purple-clad weirdo.

31 TODD SNIDER

"CONSERVATIVE CHRISTIAN,
RIGHT-WING REPUBLICAN,
STRAIGHT WHITE AMERICAN
MALES" OH BOY

Not a Dubya campaign song.

30 THE SHINS

"KISSING THE LIPOLESS" SUB POP

Oddball love song about grassy sheets and, apparently, lepers.

29 SNOW PATROL

"SPITTING GAMES" A&M

If Chris Martin were a stalker . . .

The Killers:
"Wait, isn't
Burning Man
next week?"

38

THE KILLERS

"SOMEBODY TOLD ME"

ISLAND

WHAT IT SOUNDS LIKE: Propulsive dance-rock filtered through the glitz and grime of Sin City.

BRANDON FLOWERS, SINGER, SAYS: "I think of it as our most Las Vegas song. It's basically about picking someone up in a club, and the icebreaker is, 'Somebody told me/That you had a boyfriend/That looked like a girlfriend/That I had in February of last year.' I hope it helps someone."

AMAZING FACT: The hook for "Somebody Told Me" actually started out as the decidedly less catchy "brother to brother."



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28 U2

"VERTIGO" INTERSCOPE

Blender's November cover stars set their guitars to ANNIHILATE STADIUMS mode.

27 ASHLEE SIMPSON

"PIECES OF ME" GEFEN

The MTV debutante looks like goth Jessica but sings like well-adjusted Avril.

26 BRIGHT EYES

"LUA" SADDLE CREEK

Conor Oberst's sighs are hushed, but the morning-after gloom is deafening.

25 DIZZEE RASCAL

"STAND UP TALL" XL/MATADOR

Britain's finest MC spits over a pulsating techno anthem.

24 NELLY FEAT. CHRISTINA AGUILERA

"TILT YA HEAD BACK" UNIVERSAL

The derry-derry hip-hop pinup flirts with teen-pop's dirty-dirty girl.

23 JIMMY EAT WORLD

"WORK" INTERSCOPE

Sensitive boys take heed: This is how you talk a smart girl into bed.

22 DESTINY'S CHILD

"LOSE MY BREATH" COLUMBIA

Beyoncé and co. reunite, hyperventilate.

21 DEATH CAB FOR CUTIE

"THE SOUND OF SETTLING" BARSUK

Hum-along pop about putting your feet up, sighing and letting life suck.

20 FRANZ FERDINAND

"MICHAEL" EPIC

Four straight Scots hit the discothèque on a quest for hot male ass.

19 GWEN STEFANI

FEAT. ANDRÉ 3000

"BUBBLE POP ELECTRIC" INTERSCOPE

Chaotic electro and teasing lines about getting it on in the backseat.

18 THE STREETS

"DRY YOUR EYES" VICE/ATLANTIC

This weepy get-over-your-breakup jam's like Usher's "Burn," BBC edition.

17 USHER

"CONFESSIONS PT. II" ARISTA

The baby-mama-drama jam of the year.

16 TERROR SQUAD

"LEAN BACK" SRC/UNIVERSAL

Finally, a suave move for fat bastards who can't climb stairs, much less dance.

15 TWISTA FEAT. KANYE WEST
AND JAMIE FOXX**"SLOW JAMZ"** ATLANTIC

This unlikely boudoir track should come packaged complete with massage oils and a light dimmer.

14 MODEST MOUSE

"FLOAT ON" EPIC

Pudgy boozier and lead singer Isaac Brock cracks a smile, takes his indie squad to the big leagues.

13 BRITNEY SPEARS

"TOXIC" JIVE

Mrs. Federline perfects her sex-kitten purr over spiraling dance beats.

And that's how the
Von Bondies ended
up on Death Row.

12

VON BONDIES

"C'MON C'MON"

SIRE

WHAT IT SOUNDS LIKE: The most hummable emotional breakdown of 2004.**JASON STOLLSTEIMER, SINGER, SAYS:** "It's about an abusive relationship that I watched happen. It's so weird — it's the happiest-sounding song, but the lyrics are so gruesome. When I played it for my grandparents they were like, 'This is really catchy!'"**AMAZING FACT:** "C'mon C'mon" was originally going to be a B-side. The album was already being printed when the record company decided to add the song at the last minute.

11 THE DARKNESS

"I BELIEVE IN A THING CALLED LOVE" ATLANTIC

Falsetto-spandex-hair-metal Chernobyl!

10 LORETTA LYNN

FEAT. JACK WHITE

"PORTLAND, OREGON" INTERSCOPE

Country music's grande dame returns spunky as ever, with thanks to the man in white.

9 EMINEM

"JUST LOSE IT" INTERSCOPE

Popping off Pee Wee Herman samples, Wacko Jacko digs and fart noises, Marshall Mathers reclaims his throne as pop's shrewdest 7th grader.

8 ART BRUT

"FORMED A BAND" ROUGH TRADE

Pistols-indebted howl at self-importance.

7 SCISSOR SISTERS

"TAKE YOUR MAMA" UNIVERSAL

Oedipal come-ons from NYC's new gay superteam.

6 YEAH YEAH YEAHS

"MAPS" INTERSCOPE

Unexpected pimps of the power ballad.

5 RILO KILEY

"IT'S A HIT" BRUTE/BEAUTE

Jabs at stupid white men and self-indulgent songwriters.

4 KANYE WEST

"JESUS WALKS" ROC-A-FELLA

WWJD? Chill with murderers, strippers and drug dealers on this gospel-pop hit, that's what!

3 JAY-Z

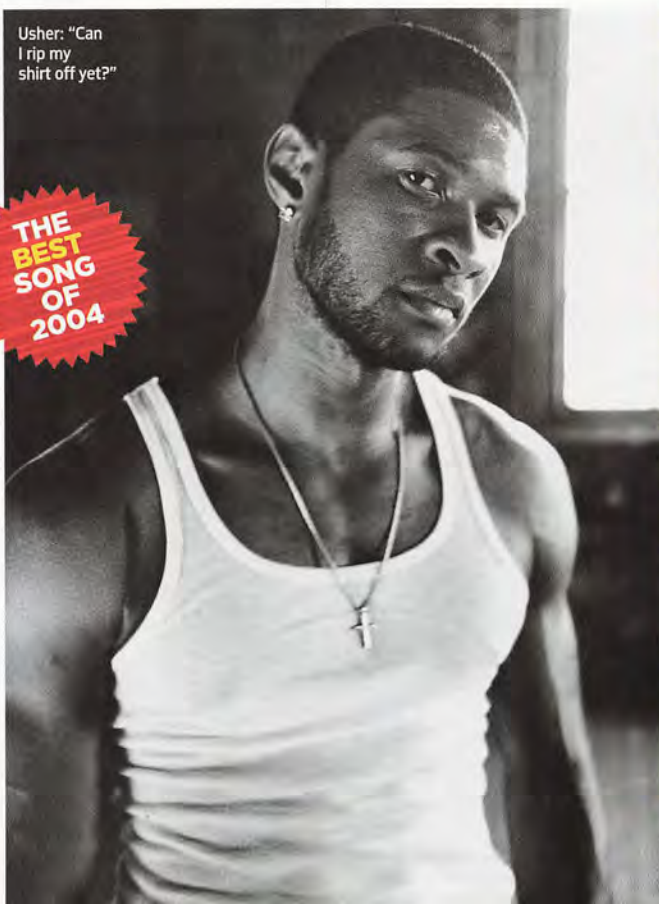
"99 PROBLEMS" ROC-A-FELLA

Producer Rick Rubin and Jay-Z team up to unleash the rap-rock monster we never knew Hova had in him.

2 FRANZ FERDINAND

"TAKE ME OUT" EPIC

Masochistic pleas, desperate love, sniper metaphors and Scottish accents fuel the year's sexiest rock single.

Usher: "Can
I rip my
shirt off yet?"THE
BEST
SONG
OF
2004

1

USHER

FEAT. LUDACRIS AND

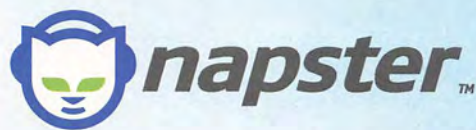
LIL JON

"YEAH!" ARISTA**WHAT IT SOUNDS LIKE:** Racy come-ons set to an air-raid drill of shrieking synths, the year's best song evoked the danger and thrill of an illicit dancefloor hook-up. It singlehandedly redefined rough-neck R&B and became as omnipresent on radios as volume knobs.**USHER SAYS:** "It's about a guy who hits the club, and a woman seduces him. She leads him to the dance floor, then he realizes she knows his girl. But he can't turn back. She makes him say 'Yeah!' I knew this could be the record of the year. And here we are!"**AMAZING FACT:** Lil Jon had to scramble to redo the "Yeah!" beat after he learned Petey Pablo had recorded a song using the same one.

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MOST TOUCHING MOMENT OF THE YEAR AWARD

BRITNEY AND KEVIN

Ms. Spears grabs some wood, July 14

JOHN RICH

"When their marriage falls apart, does she get to keep his dick?"

HAL SPARKS

"If you have to buy your own engagement ring, you get to own your boyfriend's penis."

KEITH OLBERMANN

"Here Ms. Spears proves that Kevin Federline, who got engaged to her as his previous girlfriend was giving birth to their second child, really does have more than the standard-issue number of balls."

Britney and Kevin: "I'm not hiding any Twinkies down there."



THE 2004 "WHAT THE F*%@!" AWARDS

Blender pays tribute to those candid moments that had us asking, "Hey, what the F*%@?" With celebrity smart-assery from Scissor Sisters, Xzibit, Hal Sparks and many more!



David Bowie:
A reinvention
gone too far.

"ZIGGY PLAYED ... OUCH!" AWARD

DAVID BOWIE

The Thin White Duke gets a fan-thrown lollipop lodged in his eyelid, June 18

HAL SPARKS

"Do you think whoever threw that was going, 'Damn, I was aiming for the blue eye, not the brown one?'"

XZIBIT

"That brings new meaning to the phrase 'eye candy.'"

JAKE SHEARS

"It's terrifying. To me, it's like if I saw somebody in my family get hit by a car. I love him so much."

MOST OVER-EXPOSED HEIRESS BODY AWARD

PARIS HILTON

Nicole Richie's best bud seeks out rays, paparazzi, September 5

JOHN RICH

"She's so skinny, if you stare at the picture long enough you can actually see her spleen."

HAL SPARKS

"You can see her spleen in the porn video too, but from a different angle."

CHOIRE SICHA

"She definitely expresses herself best through night-vision porn."



HARD AT WORK!

A rare photograph of the ever-elusive Paris Hilton.

THE EXPERTS

Our magnificent seven pop stars, comedians, journalists and general snarkmasters



KEITH OLBERMANN

News anchor, host of *Countdown With Keith Olbermann*



MARC MARON

Comedian and co-host of *Air America Radio's Morning Sedition* show



JOHN RICH

Fifty percent of country breakthrough stars *Big & Rich*



JAKE SHEARS

Flamboyant singer with New York City disco-hipsters *Scissor Sisters*



CHOIRE SICHA

Journalist and editorial director of the media gossip site *Gawker.com*



HAL SPARKS

Queer As Folk star, cultural commentator and *Hal Sparks Band* frontman



XZIBIT

L.A.-based rapper, actor and host of MTV's *Pimp My Ride*



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Never ask Michael Jackson to valet your car.

MOST POPULAR ALLEGED PEDOPHILE AWARD

MICHAEL JACKSON

Jacko thrills fans after pleading not-guilty to seven counts of child molestation, January 16

JOHN RICH
"Heil, Hitler!"

MARC MARON
"Yeah, 'One country, one Führer, seven charges of child molestation.'"

HAL SPARKS
"I'm not even sure that's him. But I'm not even sure he's him anymore."



MOST SPHERICAL ENTRANCE AWARD

WAYNE COYNE

The Flaming Lips frontman at Coachella Festival, May 2

XZIBIT

"That's a pretty pimp ride, but he could have put a lounge chair in there and automatic treads — made it a little more bling."

HAL SPARKS

"I had no idea Wayne Coyne had combined immune-deficiency syndrome. Kudos for still making the show, Wayne!"

MARC MARON

"That's really good gum."

Wayne Coyne has safe sex with 80,000 people simultaneously.



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The Pope: "You're supposed to kneel, dumbass!"

"HOLY BREAK-DANCERS!" AWARD

THE POPE

His Papalness is inexplicably treated to a breakdance demo, January 25

MARC MARON

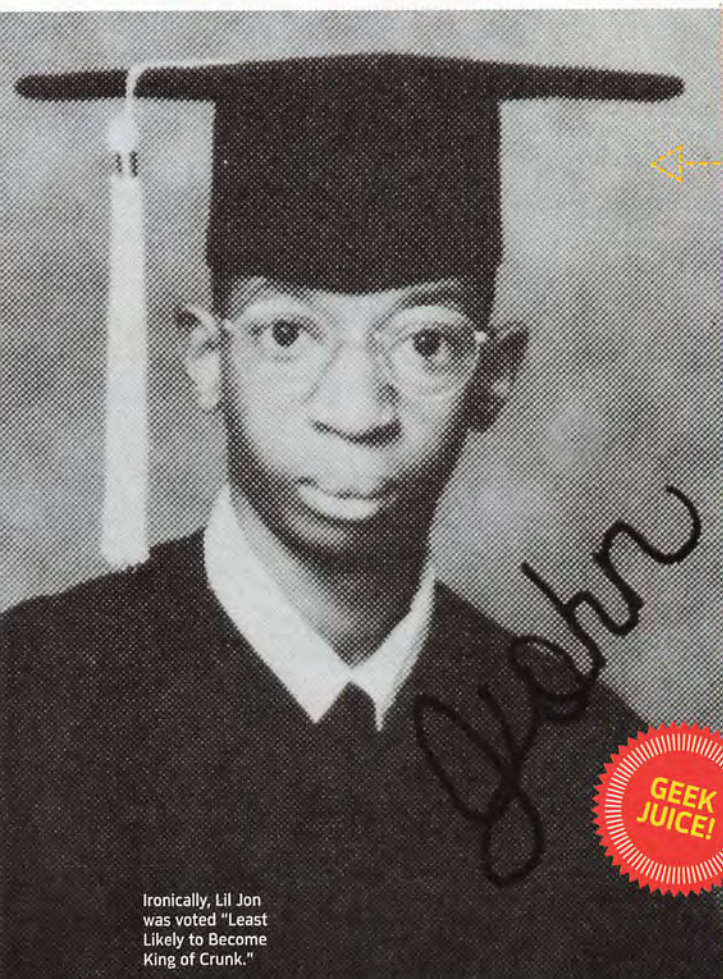
"You know he's thinking, 'It's a miracle! The savior's returned!'"

HAL SPARKS

"Actually, I'm pretty sure the Pope thought he was at an exorcism."

XZIBIT

"I think if the Vatican depended on it, the Pope could definitely bust a windmill. Get hype for Jesus!"



Ironically, Lil Jon was voted "Least Likely to Become King of Crunk."



LEAST CRUNKY PICTURE AWARD

LIL JON

The crunkmeister's high-school photo, unearthed by *Blender*, November

XZIBIT:

"He's pre-crunk. He looks like an owl!"

MARC MARON

"This would be good for a poster encouraging drug use."

HAL SPARKS

"Laugh all you want, but how much more pussy than you do you think he's getting these days?"

MOST ENTHUSIASTIC MOONER AWARD

EMINEM

Mr. Mathers unleashes his ass, again, June 5

HAL SPARKS

"Don't you think it's odd that someone spends five years slamming gays, then does nothing but show us his ass?"

JAKE SHEARS

"He's a got a real hot butt, and I would like to see some more of it!"



Eminem: "Are you gonna give me the damn rabies shot or not?"

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- Chairman Gert Boyle

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MOST MISGUIDED USE OF A MAMMARY AWARD

JANET JACKSON

History's most famous "wardrobe malfunction," the Super Bowl halftime show, February 1

HAL SPARKS

"The original plan was for Justin to show his balls until they realized the camera couldn't pick them up."

KEITH OLBERMANN

"This is the moment when Justin realized his assumption that Janet and Michael Jackson were the same person might be incorrect."

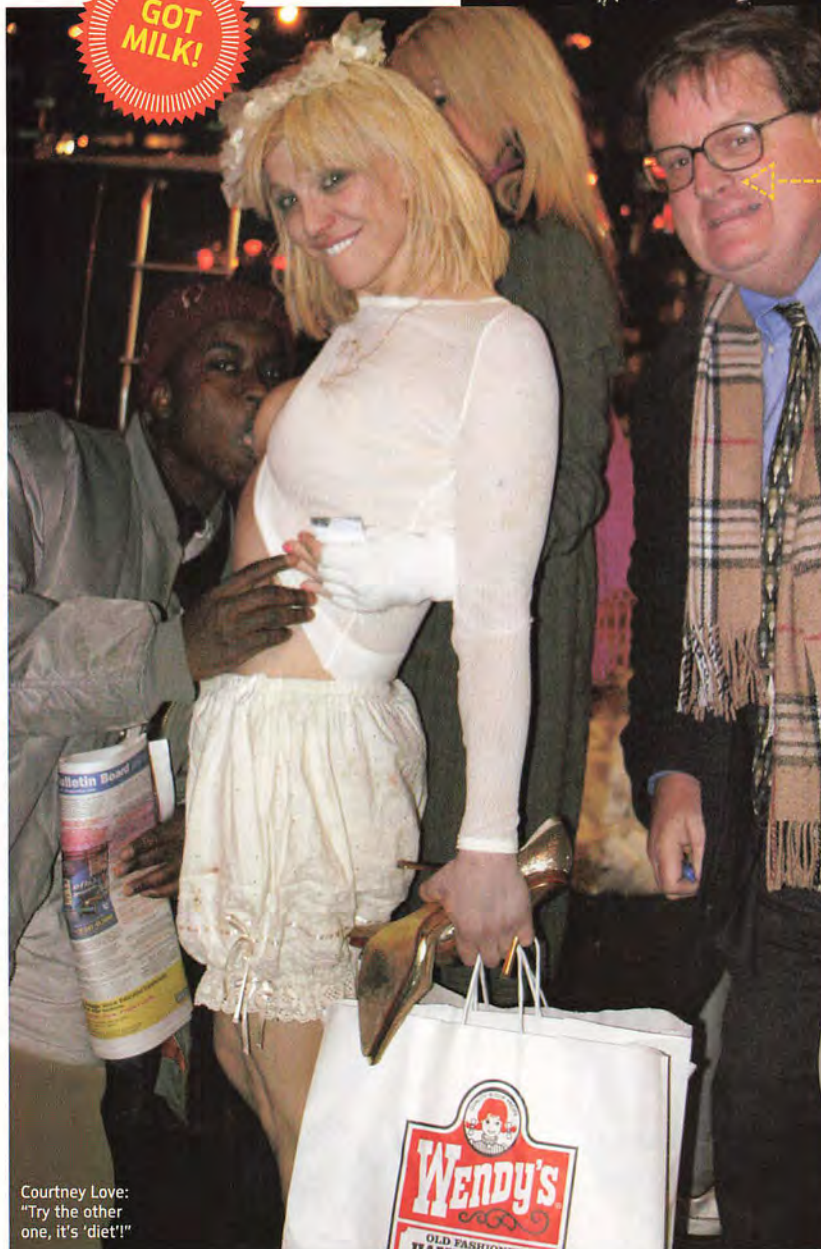
JAKE SHEARS

"I love a big old set of knockers. But somehow, they succeeded in making Janet's breasts completely un-fun. That's the sin — they took the fun out of the fun bags."

Janet and Justin:
"Maybe no
one's going to
notice . . ."



GOT
MILK!



Courtney Love:
"Try the other
one, it's 'diet'!"

MOST MISGUIDED USE OF A MAMMARY (RUNNER-UP AWARD)

COURTNEY LOVE

Mrs. Cobain gives a total stranger some lovin', March 17

JOHN RICH

"Wendy's has really ramped up its 99-cent menu."

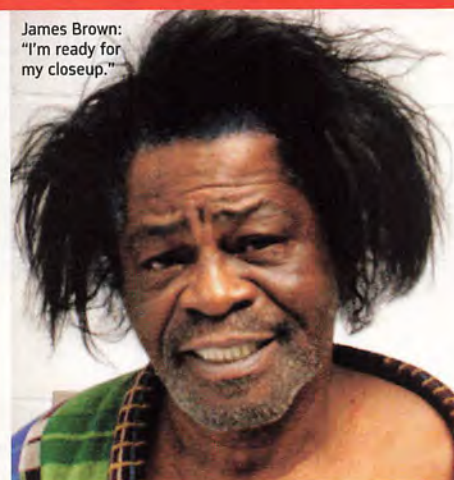
XZIBIT

"I'd rather have my shirt pulled over my head and get whacked with a metal pipe than be in his position."

JAKE SHEARS

"I love it when people say, 'Oh, she just does it to sell more records.' Who thinks, 'Courtney Love's letting total strangers suck on her breast? Now I've got to buy her record?'"

James Brown:
"I'm ready for
my closeup."



MOST DISHEVELED MUGSHOT

JAMES BROWN

The Godfather of Soul is arrested for allegedly pushing his wife, January 28

KEITH OLBERMANN

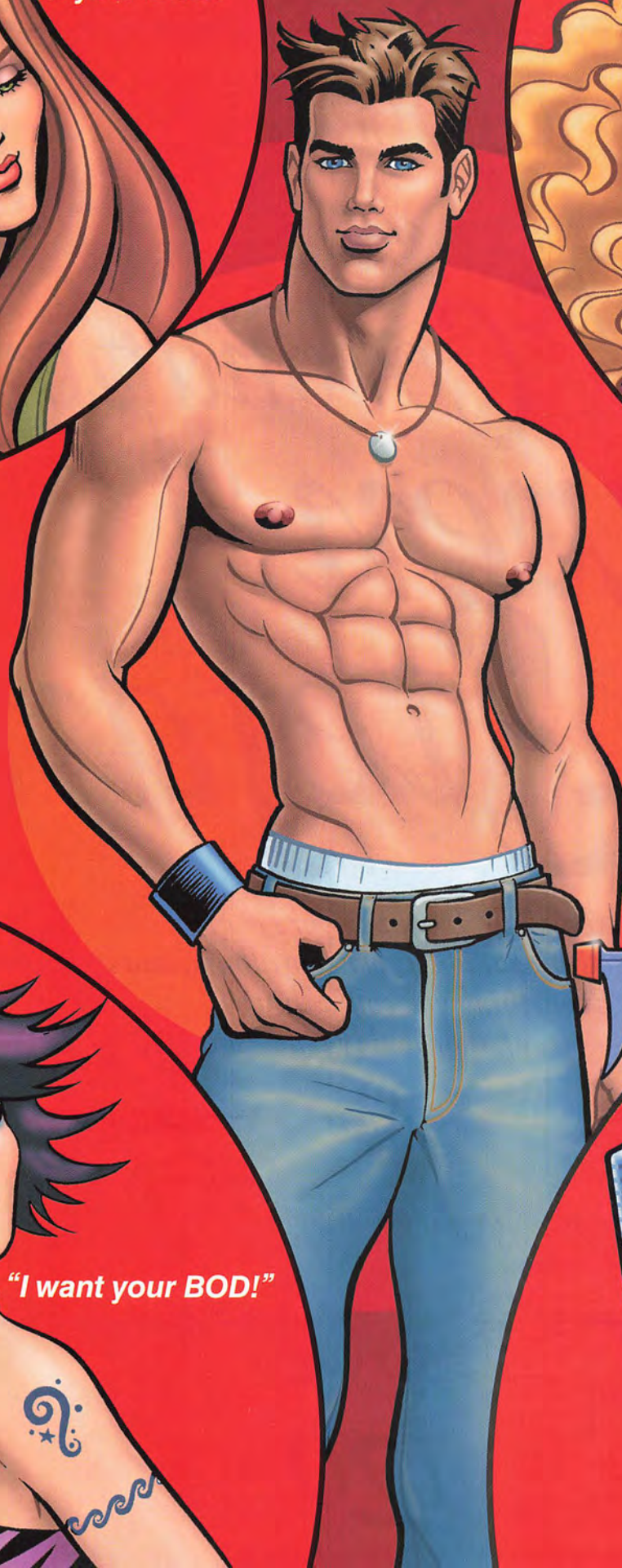
"You can tell he's thinking, 'A bath towel? Fifty years of soul and all I get is a bath towel?'"

HAL SPARKS

"He really is the hardest-working man on the cell block, isn't he?"

"I want your BOD!"

"I want your BOD!"



"I want your BOD!"



New!

Woman of the Year



*The Coronation
of
Gwen
Stefani*

*Blender joins the No Doubt singer's court
to find out about her solo album, movie career
and love life. "Everything you could think
up is probably true," she says.*

By Ariel Levy

Photography by Judson Baker

Styling by Andrea Lieberman

Gwen Stefani:
"And this is where
the dog lives."



Production by Still Productions, London; Props and Set Design by Greta Cuneo;
Makeup by Lisa Butler for ArtPartnerBeauty.com; Hair by Danilo for the Wallgroup

BUSTIER BY VIVIENNE
WESTWOOD; SKIRT,
VINTAGE; SHOES BY
DIOR; JACKET, SCARF
AND SKIRT ALL VINTAGE

Gwen Stefani is dancing barefoot in her kitchen. One of the tracks she's just finished for her first solo album is playing on her laptop, and she's spinning around saying "I love this song!" while a small posse of assembled staff looks on: her publicist, her graphic designer and her British manservant Pete, who is juicing a lemon and preparing Stefani her light, fragrant lunch.

All around Stefani, in her Mediterranean-style Los Angeles mansion, are the lavish accumulations of the truly successful: a driveway crowded with Mercedes; huge vases of tall, perfect lilies on every table; two silent cleaning women fluffing every cushion and dusting every shiny surface; a parade of Herb Ritts photographs of Stefani with her shirtless husband, Bush front-man Gavin Rossdale; and drawings by couturier John Galliano of the dress he made for her wedding, framed with a card from the designer that reads: "Dearest Gwen, Thank you for the most amazing evening." Stefani arrived here from London just last night, but Rossdale had to stay behind. "We're trying to get his dog out here," she explains, "but it's really hard to get a private plane to fly a person with a dog."

Stefani sings along to her song "Hajuku Girls" in the kind of mock pop-star voice one might use to croon "Like a Virgin" into a hairbrush. "I'm your biggest fan!" she squeals in perfect unison with her recorded self. And if *Blender* didn't know that the woman bouncing and

"Hey, why are all these windows broken?"

FUR STOLE BY LOUIS VUITTON; BUSTIER BY PRADA

twirling about was the queen of this castle, that she and Madonna have actually "hung out several times," that the voice coming from the computer has sold 26 million records worldwide with her band No Doubt, we might think she was exactly what she just said: a fan, a starry-eyed hopeful bopping along to the beat.

Blender's Woman of the Year still has the giddy enthusiasm of a person who is surprised by her luck, even after 17 years in music, three Grammys and the launch of her own fashion label, L.A.M.B., which,

Gwen-ishly, stands for "Love Angel Music Baby," also the name of her new album. *Love Angel Music Baby* will not only bring her another car or manservant, it's sure to brighten the celebrity spotlight, as happened to Justin Timberlake when he stepped out of 'N Sync.

But going solo is still a risk, a move away from a proven formula and out into the unknown. Just ask Mick Jagger. Or David Lee Roth. Or Al Gore. Stepping out — at age 34, no less — of the protective cocoon of a band that she has been in half her life requires remarkable ambition,

power, balls. Gwen Stefani doesn't see it that way.

"Everyone keeps calling it a solo record and I keep calling it a dance record," she says. "'Cause if I was doing a solo record, that would be like, finally, *me* . . . finally this is the real Gwen Stefani. It's not that. This album is actually *less* of me than I've ever been before."



GROWING UP, GWEN Stefani never fantasized about being a rock star. Never pictured living the brilliant, transatlantic life of pop royalty. The Gwen Stefani story, according to Gwen Stefani, goes like this: All her life, things *just happened* to her. She is an accidental rock star — or at least she likes to think so, maybe because it's true or maybe because lusting after fame and fortune seems unladylike to her.

And to be sure, Stefani has been lucky in one crucial regard: The men in her life have buffeted her from many of the uphill struggles of a life in music.

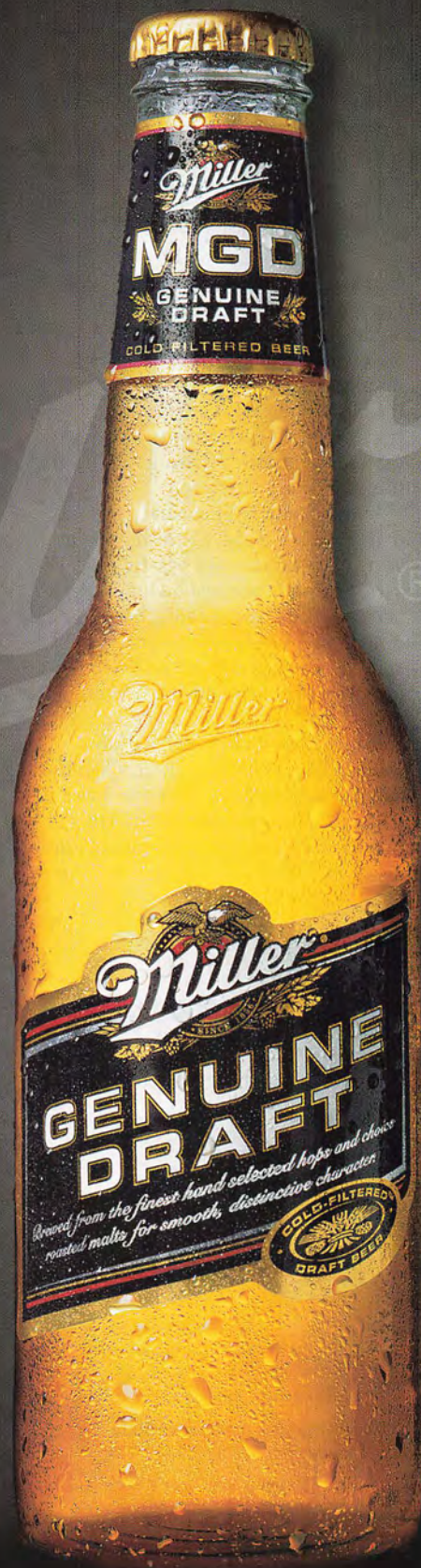
Her brother Eric founded No Doubt when Gwen was still in high school in Anaheim, California, and herded her into the band. "Eric's the one who brought the first Madness record home and got us all into ska," she says. "I'd wake up because he'd be banging on the piano. →



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{ Gwen Stefani }

He would always be trying to get me to sing, because he couldn't sing very much himself, and I could sing along to the *Annie* soundtrack or *Evita*."

Gwen's first real boyfriend, Tony Kanal, was, and is, No Doubt's bassist and co-songwriter. Kanal has always handled all the wheeling and dealing and planning that are the crucial, tedious busy work of any successful band.

"Tony took care of everyone and he was on top of all the business," Stefani says. "Nothing went wrong — no stone unturned, every corner cleaned. The opposite of me. I'm a mess!" (She means this literally as well as figuratively: Stefani says that of all her indulgences, the one she'd most hate to lose is her cleaning women. "I get home, I drop." She mimes throwing things in every direction.)

Stefani entered the band that made her a star when she was 17 years old. "I was a very passive girl," she says. Stefani is perched on an immaculate, overstuffed white sofa, her white hair pinned up in a glamorous puff. "I was completely satisfied with just being in love with my boyfriend and dreaming about getting married." Stefani didn't consider herself talented. "I always thought of myself as really lazy because I was bad at school . . . Not that I was a bad girl," she says quickly, "just that it was hard for me to learn. I couldn't even



A pre-Dior Gwen in high school.



No Doubt in 1997, from left: Adrian Young, Tony Kanal, Gwen Stefani and Tom Dumont

pay attention. I spent the whole fuckin' time drawing pictures. The bell would ring and I would be like, 'Gosh the period's over?' I would have just written my boyfriend's name in really sketched out, really nice letters."

Part of the fun of being a No Doubt fan has always been tracking Stefani's crushes and heartaches through her unusually transparent, occasionally artless lyrics. Listening to a No Doubt song can feel like peeking into Stefani's high-school journal: finding out on 1995's "Sunday Morning" how excruciating it was for her when Kanal ended their romance; hearing, on *Rock Steady*'s "Underneath it All," about how happy she's become with Rossdale ("You give me the most gorgeous sleep/That I've ever had"); or how badly she wants a baby on "Simple Kind of Life" ("I always thought I'd be a mom/Sometimes I wish for a mistake").

Gwen Stefani wrote that song in 1999, a couple of years after No Doubt and Bush were pushed together on a tour by their label, Interscope Records. Initially, everyone in the band was dead-set against the pairing. "The label was always talking about *Gavin and Bush*," she says in the whine of a kid talking about *history and math*. "We were just like, 'Whatever. We are not going on tour with those guys; that's not what we are.' And then we went and it was love. It was magic."

Well, maybe for her. The rest of No Doubt was furious.

"Everybody was against it," Stefani says. "It was a very crazy time. There was already my breakup with Tony, and we

were enjoying success for the first time and having outside things come in to our little band, our little family. And then I met Gavin. It was really lonely, because I felt like nobody wanted me to go out with him. My ex-boyfriend and all of my, like, brothers in the band were saying, 'You are not gonna go out with that guy!'"

Why not?

"Because I had never been out with anyone else! And other reasons. Everything you could think up in your brain is probably true."



GWEN STEFANI STARTED thinking about making a solo album when No Doubt was on tour in 2002 to promote

Rock Steady. This was just a few weeks after she married Rossdale in London, went on a quickie honeymoon to Capri, then had a second ceremony in Los Angeles at the home of Jimmy

Iovine, her boss at Interscope Records. ("That dress," she says of her custom-designed Galliano with a giggle, "was the whole reason I had another wedding.") All four members of No Doubt were planning to take a break after the triple-platinum *Rock Steady* "because we hadn't had one in so long and everyone was burned out," Stefani says. "Me, first and foremost."

But the girl who had always worried she was lazy wasn't planning on taking it easy. "I had so many things I wanted to do: the baby, the movie, the whole list, and the clock was so loud in my head!" Stefani says making her solo album was actually a low priority, but that →



ALL ABOUT MY YEAR

GWEN STEFANI

No bandmates were consulted in the answering of this questionnaire!



Best song I heard in 2004

OutKast's "Hey Ya!"

Trend I'm most sick of

Reality television.

Sex symbol of 2004

Beyoncé

Most expensive purchase of 2004

A Vivienne

Westwood shopping spree.

Most rock-star moment of 2004

Every day felt like a rock-star day.

Where I'll spend New Year's Eve

At my house in L.A. with 300 people dancing to my record.

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Gwen Stefani

once she put it in motion, it was impossible to halt. An all-star group of musicians and producers from very different genres came forward to collaborate with her: André 3000, Dr. Dre, Linda Perry, Dallas Austin, the Neptunes and Nellee Hooper, to name a few. And once she told the label she was interested in doing her own "side project," you can imagine their reaction. Gwen Stefani, the billboard-ready blonde with the crazy voice and the mad style is finally going solo? *Ka-ching!*

"As soon as I told Jimmy Iovine that I wanted to do this record, it's been, like, his record," she says. "When someone believes in you more than you believe in yourself, you almost just want to do it to please them."

"I would literally back her on anything," Iovine says from his L.A. office. "Her vision is that strong. I use her a lot in Interscope's business, the way I would use Dr. Dre: 'What do you think of this? What do you think of that?'"

But when Stefani first started working on *Love Angel Music Baby*, she found herself — or cast herself — in a familiar role, as the subordinate: dealing with other people's time lines, striving to meet other people's goals.

"This is how crazy it was," she says, tapping her feet frantically as if still buzzing with the pressure and the adrenaline of the whole thing. "The record company called me and was like, 'You've got to go work with Linda Perry. Now. She only has five

days out of the whole year to work with you.' And I'd just got off tour! I was tired, I was burned out, I'd just got married. I hadn't even seen my husband! But then I thought, OK, if I don't do this now...

... I want to do great things, and I know that I'm super-lucky?" she says in perfect SoCal uppeak.

"So I should just take all the opportunities. It's one thing to have 'Just a Girl' on the radio, but to have years of cake and ice cream?" She grins and makes eating noises. "It's gonna end soon! So basically, I cried in my bed, like, for real."

When Stefani talks, she actually does sound very much like that teenager who



Marrying Gavin Rossdale, London, 2002



↑ "All right, I've fixed the lightbulb!" Performing with No Doubt, June 2004



With Bono and Mom, 2002

sings into hairbrushes and spends 6th period tracing her boyfriend's name in curlicues. But it's confusing, hearing this animated, teenybopper voice come out of the crimson mouth of a woman who is so outrageously glamorous. She doesn't wear

clothes so much as she does costumes. Even sitting around the house, she has on gold high-heeled Mary Janes and a plaid Vivienne Westwood top with a cape-like piece that she

throws dramatically over her shoulder every 20 minutes or so.

Her assistant brings out an exquisite china coffee service and she takes hers with honey and milk, raising a tiny teacup to her lips with a perfectly manicured hand. "I feel so 'lady' now!" she says, beaming. She is not unlike the cliché of the platinum-haired silent-movie star who opens her mouth and spoils the illusion of frosty allure with her Betty Boop voice.

Only in Gwen Stefani's case, the tears and the eating noises and the "rads" that pepper her conversations are a large part of her Valley-girl-next-door appeal. You can't be too fancy when you begin your career with a bindi glued to your forehead or decorate your backyard with two intersecting green street signs that read "Gwen Drive" and "Gavin Way."

"I'm gaudy and cheesy and I always want to push it," she admits. "Adrian [Young] was always the yang of the band, if I was the yin. If I'm the cheese, he's the cool. That's what makes No Doubt." She thinks about it for a minute. "We would be, like, the most not-best-friends."

The down side of all this guileless, youthful charm is that Stefani sometimes seems on the verge of drowning in her own adolescent insecurities. "I think Gwen is very over-critical of herself," says Linda Perry, who was the first producer to work with Stefani on her solo tracks. (Perry was the lead singer of 4 Non Blondes and then went on to write and produce Pink hits like "Get the Party Started" and Christina Aguilera's "Beautiful.") "There was one day where she had a little insecurity breakdown. But I found it very endearing: I loved seeing her that insecure. You meet a lot of people who have half her talent and they think they're God's creative monster."

Somehow, when Stefani tells it, she is, again, the person who things are happening to, not the person in control. "At the Grammys, Linda Perry came up to me like a fucking bulldozer and basically put me in a headlock and was like, 'We need to write some songs together,'" says Stefani. Gwen was accustomed to taking her time — sometimes years — to write songs with No Doubt. "It was always a →

Her backyard is decorated with signs reading "Gwen Drive" and "Gavin Way."



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{ Gwen Stefani }

Battle of Cold Harbor: Can you spot ZZ Top?

LONER LOSERS!

Solo? Oh No!

Gwen Stefani's decision to fly solo might prove smart, but some miscontents haven't fared so well....

JUDAS

THE SPLIT: It's hard to share the spotlight with a charismatic frontman like J.C., but Judas's split from the Apostles was particularly acrimonious. Consumed with guilt after selling Christ out to the Romans for 30 pieces of silver, Judas pulled the ultimate rock-star move and hanged himself.

THE RESULT: The name "Judas" became synonymous with "traitorous bastard," and the epithet was yelled at Bob Dylan in 1966 when he dared to play electric guitar.

THE AMERICAN SOUTH

THE SPLIT: Despite stringing together a successful 85-year career with the United States, the slavery-lovin' Confederacy struck out on its own for a turbulent four-year solo stint. Following a particularly disastrous gig at Appomattox, they reluctantly rejoined the Union in 1865.

THE RESULT: Molly Hatchet

AL GORE

THE SPLIT: After eight years in Bill Clinton's shadow, Gore distanced himself from Bubba during his own Presidency campaign in 2000, discouraging his boss from making cameos that would only remind the public how uncharismatic the VP was in comparison.

THE RESULT: The White House got a new Bush; Columbia U got a new professor.

SHELLEY LONG

THE SPLIT: As the female lead on TV's most popular sitcom for five years, Long had every reason to think she could walk away from *Cheers* and not, say, instantly slide into total obscurity and cultural irrelevance. *Cheers* managed to stay on top for another six years with the not-yet-corpulent Kirstie Alley.

THE RESULT: *Troop Beverly Hills*, anyone?

STEVE KANDELL

long, hard process. So I was like, 'I can't sit next to you and pour my heart out. I don't even know you!' There were times I was just like, 'Fuck you, dude, you're totally stepping on my territory.' Other times we were really inspired by each other. Linda and I had a meant-to-be thing that was magical. I get emotional about it," Stefani says, and starts to cry a little.

It will probably come as no surprise that Stefani is big on emotion. She is also big on magic. With Pharrell Williams, she "wrote three songs in three days and they're all magic." The Rock Steady tour was "so magic." Shooting her cameo appearance as Jean Harlow in Martin Scorsese's upcoming biopic on Howard Hughes, her film debut, was "super-magical." She had a "magical night" with Adrian Young at the MTV Video Music Awards in Miami. And recording with André 3000 was, you guessed it, "total magic!"

Despite all her breathless enthusiasm for the new pool of talent she's been soaking in, Stefani claims she has no plans to stay solo. "No Doubt is definitely not broken up," she says firmly. "I don't even have plans to tour at this point; I don't see myself putting out a bunch of Gwen Stefani records. Who knows? I might have a baby and just want to stare at it all day and quit everything." She assesses her time with No Doubt thus far like so: "To be able to put that many years into one project? It was magic."



BACK IN HER capacious, green-tiled kitchen, Stefani plays a few more of her new tracks for *Blender*, and one in particular stands out: a heart-melting '80s-ish pop song called "Cool" that she wrote with Dallas Austin. She sings, "After all the obstacles/It's good to see you now with someone else/It's such a miracle that you and me are still good friends/After all that we've been through/I know we're cool."

Sounds personal. Is this about anyone in particular? Any bassist in particular?

"It reminds me of the ending of something... that place we are with the band. Like, how everything's cool no mat-

With Leo in Aviator



ter what and we all know it," she says and looks at her feet. "And other things you can probably pick up on."

Blender wonders if all this isn't a little weird for her husband: having a super-famous wife who's still intensely enmeshed with an ex boyfriend, an ex she's written whole records about, an ex who has produced several tracks on her solo album, an ex on whom she still depends ("Doing this on my own there's this whole pile of things where you go,

'Frick! Where's Tony?'").

Stefani won't get specific about it. But she does admit that working without No Doubt on this record has made it possible for Rossdale to contribute more to her music.

"It's one thing to be in a band with all those guys, and obviously Gavin's not gonna offer much of an opinion," she says. "But when I'm on my own, we can talk even more, he can have more of an opinion. It's been really... romantic."

For the first time, Rossdale wrote some lyrics for one of Stefani's songs, a track called "The Real Thing." "It's so clear the lines that he wrote because they're so visual and mine are always the most obvious," she says. "Like, just how you would talk it."

Their second wedding anniversary, on September 14, just passed. "We haven't done anything yet because he's in London, but when he gets here I'm sure we'll make out or something."

For all her insecurities, Stefani is refreshingly proud of this album. She fully expects 7th graders to be slow dancing to "Cool" and requesting it — begging for it — at make-out parties.

"That," she says, "would be so perfect! The thing about my record is you can try to not like it. You can try. But you know what? It's gonna be your guilty pleasure. I just know it!" [BLENDER]

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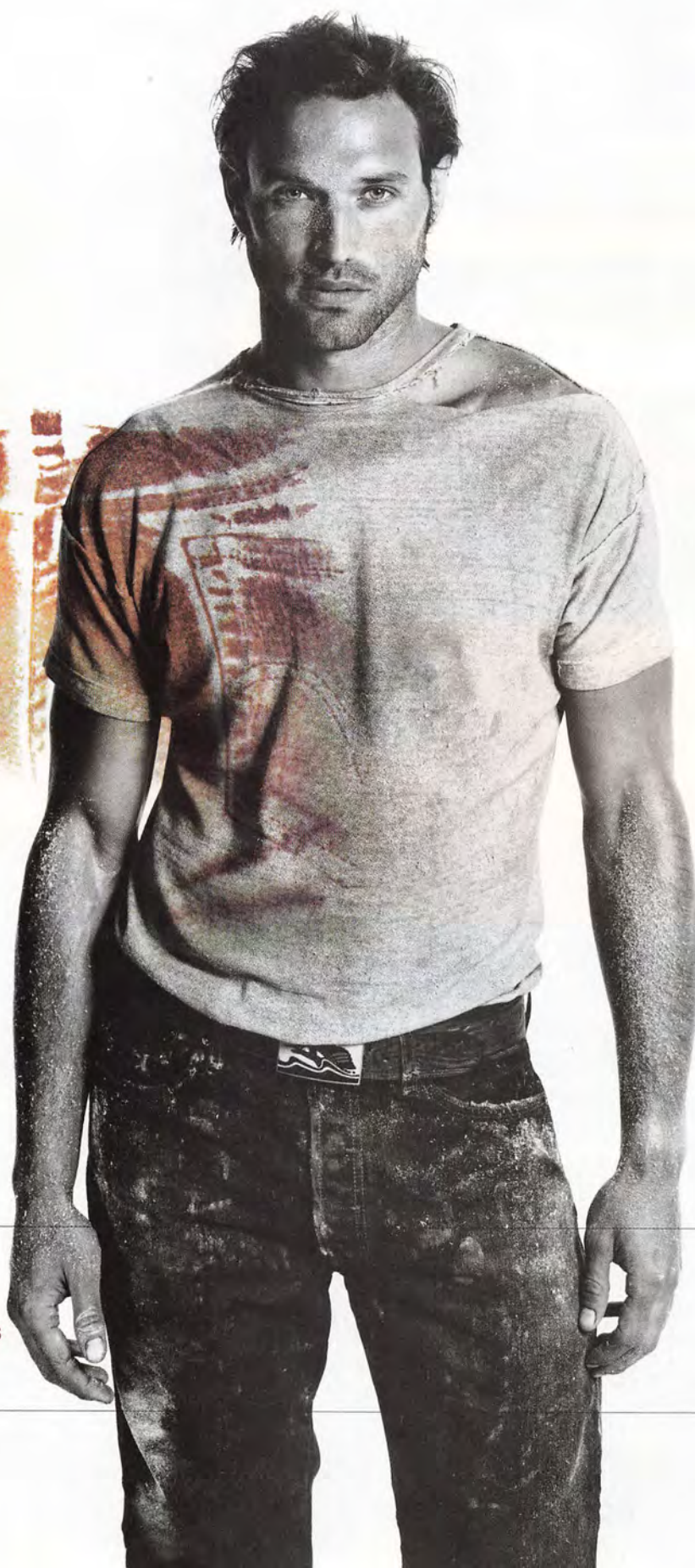
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132
U2

Big riffs! Huge choruses! Songs about death and miracles! Holy iPod, U2's back!

★★★★



160
BRITNEY SPEARS

Mrs. Federline unveils her first hits collection, dating back to when she was that innocent.

★★★



162
MICHAEL JACKSON

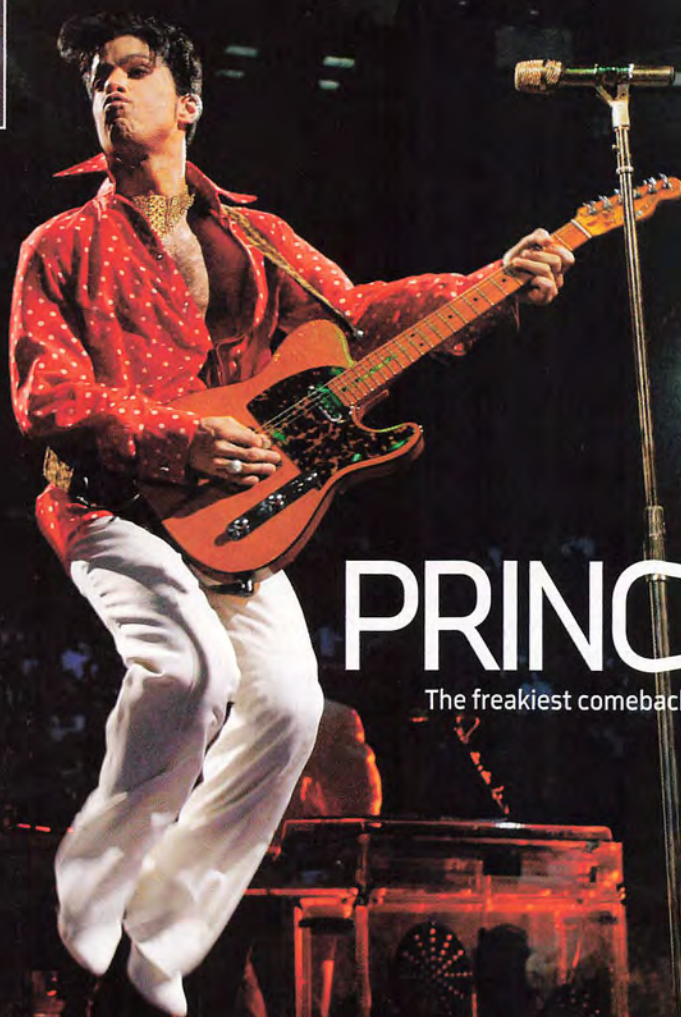
A new box set traces his amazing career of hits, one nose at a time.

★★★

THE GUIDE

THEY MAKE 'EM. WE REVIEW 'EM

NEW RELEASES	132
CHART	156
MY MUSIC	158
REISSUES	160
LIVE!	170
MOVIES	172
DVDS	180
BOOKS	182
GAMES	186



PRINCE

The freakiest comeback tour of the year — reviewed. p170

Band of Brothers

Death, sex and divinity still haunt and inspire rock's grandest group

U2

HOW TO DISMANTLE AN ATOMIC BOMB

★★★★

INTERSCOPE

"I'VE HAD ENOUGH of romantic love," Bono wails in "Miracle Drug," U2's latest expressway to rock & roll heaven. It's the second track on *How To Dismantle an Atomic Bomb*, and after the manic maneuver of "Vertigo," which opens the album in a Red Bull rush, "Miracle Drug" calms and revivifies. With the Edge's sky-sweeping guitars and a rhythmic foundation that works like load-absorbing shocks on a winged chariot, it's a welcome-home hug for U2 fans who've been waiting four years for their mystical fix.

But what's Mr.

Wraparounds going on about with that rejection of romance? Just a minute ago he was raving lustily about a crimson-taloned babe with "Jesus 'round her neck," and moaning "your love is teaching me how to kneel." Elsewhere on *Atomic*, he tosses out melt-worthy lines like "I saw you in the curve of the moon," gets the Edge to shout "You look so beautiful tonight" like a first-class ogler, and waxes chivalric about "the mysterious distance between a man and a

woman" while a horn section conjures images of Jude Law in *Alfie*.

Yet in "A Man and a Woman," again, he announces that love is what he wants, not romance. The long-married heartthrob is giving up on the sweetest thing? For what? Not that God guy again!

Actually, U2's unusual relationship with romance has much to do with their unique position in the pop universe. Eleven albums in, and on a third wind after 2000's *All That You Can't Leave Behind* replenished their middle-aged repu-

tation, U2 remains unrivaled in their relevance to music fans of all ages. From OutKast's Big Boi to soccer moms, millions of people adore U2 — and not casually. And it's going to

get more extreme with this latest *tour de force* of tune and mood.

So here's what love has to do with it: U2 has a wider understanding of that life force than anybody in popular music, maybe ever. Working mostly with Steve Lillywhite, who produced their first three records, *Atomic*'s 11 songs are motivated by a typical set of intensities: the death of Bono's father, the maturation of Bono's and the Edge's kids, the AIDS crisis in

U2 HAS EQUAL LOVE FOR CHRIST AND SUPERMODELS.

U2's GREATEST CDs

THE JOSHUA TREE

ISLAND, 1987

★★★★★

A recovery from *Rattle and Hum*, their ill-suited immersion in R&B, *The Joshua Tree* is pompous desert music (the black & white cover shouts "Take us seriously"), but also as stirring as any album of the last 20 years. With sales of 10 million, it turned U2 into Rock's Most Earnest Superstars.

ACHTUNG BABY

ISLAND, 1992

★★★★★

Caked with mascara and lipstick, it's a frivolous kiss to European dance music, and proved they could make a sharp turn while still racing ahead. "Even Better Than the Real Thing" argues that being fake is more fun than being sincere; "One" is the essence of their compassionate balladry.

THE BEST OF 1980-1990

ISLAND, 1998

★★★★★

It neglects their startling, grandiose beginnings — only one song from the first two albums? — but by skimming a decade's worth of singles, it documents their initial sense of music as a quest for passion, peace and the biggest reverb money can buy.

ALL THAT YOU CAN'T LEAVE BEHIND

INTERSCOPE, 2000

★★★★★

Following three albums of art music, they're back to big themes: death, ecological disaster and the struggle to hold on to optimism. "Elevation" provides uplift, and Bono gets through an entire album without howling like a vicar. ROB TANNENBAUM



U2 from left: Adam Clayton, Bono, the Edge and Larry Mullen Jr.

Africa, and New York after September 11 ("City of Blinding Lights," inspired by a Madison Square Garden concert they played only weeks after the disaster), to name a few typically huge topics. They cover a familiar range of sounds, too — snaky, kinda dirty rockers matched with swooning blue-eyed soul, and those stirring canticles of spiritual ascension.

Yet because U2's sound has come to signify an open heart — whether through the careening riffs and choruses of a rocker like "Vertigo," or the gradual crescendo of a ballad like "Sometimes You Can't Make It On Your Own," one of several songs inspired by the death of Bono's father — it nearly always feels fresh, the way a new flame does.

It's not that Bono's lyrics avoid cliché; on the contrary, this good Irishman wields sentimentality like a switchblade. And the Edge's guitar work, Adam Clayton's root-chakra basslines and those virile Larry Mullen Jr. drum parts definitely access the groin. But while most pop serenaders focus on the emotions that radiate from sexual attraction, U2 has always made music of devotion, in a larger sense.

Their Christian roots remain — nobody writes better secular hymns, and "Yahweh" is one of their best. The healthy dose of sin ingested for 1991's *Achtung Baby* lends juice to "Vertigo" and "All Because of You." But if *Atomic* is about any one thing in particular, it's about integration, figuring out how all the pieces of a soul relate.

Sometimes this has led to piety, as on *The Unforgettable Fire* in 1984, or sin-troubled confusion, as on *Pop*, 13 years later. But after 25 years, U2's music is so broad and welcoming it can express ardor equally well for Christ, wives, supermodels, children or Bishop Desmond Tutu. Bono and his band no longer worry about who owns their souls — everybody does, and that's exactly what U2 wants.

ANN POWERS

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Miracle Drug," "Love and Peace Or Else," "Crumbs From Your Table," "City of Blinding Lights"

THE SCORE >>

★★★★★

EXCELLENT. A MUST-HAVE

★★★★

GREAT. CHECK IT OUT

★★★

GOOD

★★

JUST OK

★

WEAK

AIR

SURFING ON A ROCKET ★★

ASTRALWERKS

French chill-out duo get up off o' that sofa with remix EP

Making Air more danceable misses the point; Jean-Benoît Dunckel and Nicolas Godin's seductive concoctions have always been more about what happens after the club. This set treats two high points from the recent *Talkie Walkie* — the sensuous

"Surfing On a Rocket" and the banjo epic (a phrase you don't often hear) "Alpha Beta Gaga" — to six remixes, dragging them kicking and screaming toward the disco. DJ Mark Ronson adds old-school bounce to the latter, but guest rapper Rhymefest's verses are lead weights. Only a bristling '80s rehaul of "Surfing" by French disco kid Joakim could cause minor dance-floor commotion. Remixes should flesh out the original creations; here they're left sounding distinctly, well, airless.

STEVE LOWE

DOWNLOAD THIS: "Surfing On a Rocket" (To The Smiling Sun Remix)

FRANK BLACK

FRANK BLACK FRANCIS ★★

SPINART

The Pixies frontman simultaneously preserves and pisses on his band's legacy

In 1987, shortly before the Pixies recorded their debut EP, *Come On Pilgrim*, songwriter Frank Black sat down with his acoustic guitar and a cheap cassette player and tore through the band's early repertoire. The low-fi, heavily bootlegged

Air: "So, uh... what are you wearing?"



session gets an official release here, and the sound is now so spiffy you can almost hear the barrel's bottom being scraped. As history, it's charming enough, and contains a bona fide rarity in "Boom Chickaboom." Since a makeshift Pixies unplugged disc wasn't enough to carry the release, Black followed the bizarre anti-logic that's guided his solo career and supplemented it with a separate CD of 13 newly recorded Pixies songs, backed by avant-rock duo Two Pale Boys. Hearing "Cactus" and

"Subbacultcha" transformed into droning ambient jazz is upsetting, yet somehow perfect for this listen-once-and-destroy disc.

ROSS RAIHALA

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Broken Face," "Ed Is Dead"

THE BEAUTIFUL SOUTH

GOLDDIGGAS, HEADNODDERS & PHOLK SONGS ★★

SONY IMPORT

Brilliantly odd covers album from members of Fatboy Slim's old band, the Housemartins

Though they're the grillion-selling gold standard of fortysomething pop radio in Britain, the Beautiful South are a mystery here. This could be because, while they sound as sumptuous as the Isley Brothers fronting the Eagles, they look like the cast of *The Full Monty*. Fifteen years in, the South come through their covers-album moment with flying colors by mixing the perverse with the heart-felt. They specialize in malignant MOR and bittersweet country, so "You're the One That I Want" from the *Grease* soundtrack becomes a slow-grind for lascivious divor- ➔

Capt. Not-So-Fantastic

The Human Hit Machine is now a middle-age Ballad Factory

ELTON JOHN

PEACHTREE ROAD ★★

UNIVERSAL

SOMEWHERE IN RURAL England, Sir Elton rises from his downy bed, pulls on a Versace tracksuit and pads to the piano. He pushes a button, and out pops a new song, "My Elusive Drug," lyrics e-mailed from bernie@taupin.com. It is very true to form. Starts with stately pop-gospel piano, and moves into lyrics that are, shall we say, none too taxing on the old noggin. "Haven't always been good," begins one line. "Never really been bad," it continues. "Most times I've been happy," is next. "Yet sometimes I've been—" Take a wild guess.

In addition to decades under the influence, John has spent nearly half his 57 years in the Top 40, with a chart song every year from 1970 to 1996. When you can't blow your nose without writing a decent pop hit, compelling reasons to leave the penthouse of formula and seek the horny

black toad of triumph are elusive. John has made so many great songs of such melodic surprise and lyrical invention that it's hard to know how to take these well-crafted, powerfully belted, eerily déjà-vu-inducing numbers.

The Philly Soul-ish "Answer In the Sky" is a stirring call to spiritual wonderment, but it's impossible to hear without pondering which animated creature's journey it will accompany. The country-ish "Turn the Lights Out When You Leave" and "Porch Swing In Tupelo" evoke less Mississippi fields than flashy Broadway sets of Mississippi fields. The other swaying, grooving or soaring songs of contentment are expert, tuneful and profoundly inoffensive. File under: The Disney Years.

CHRIS NORRIS

DOWNLOAD THIS: "The Weight of the World"

ELTON JOHN'S CURRENT LISTENING:

THE KILLERS
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Elton John, after his Dork Eye For the Queer Guy makeover



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Destiny's Child, from left: Beyoncé Knowles, Michelle Williams and Kelly Rowland



pulsed marching beat, is a my-it's-getting-hot-in-here call to any man alive. "Can you keep up?," Destiny's dare in the foxiest pep-rally cheer of all time. On "Soldier" — featuring don't-let-them-see-my-boner raps by T.I. and Lil Wayne — the dating parameters narrow to "a rude boy that good to me with street credibility."

Any man who passes their test — hats off to you, sir — must realize he is dating not one woman but a phalanx. Even the album's tender moments are claustrophobic; as close as you get to one girl, the other two are ready to burst in. In "Cater 2 U," Beyoncé sweetly offers her man a foot rub, but Kelly is right behind her, promising to "keep rocking the hottest outfits."

It's fun enough, until the interminable breakup theme that drags down the second half. The women compete like reality-TV contestants to lodge accusations of infidelity and assert independence. On "Girl," they vow solidarity: "I'm your girl, you're my girl, we're your girls." Beyoncé, who co-wrote and co-produced most of the album, wrote a solid hook here, but the harmonies trip over each other as each girl pushes her way to the front of the song.

The flirty passions that fuel their music cool by the end of the disc, and when they're not being seductive, the gals turn tame. Despite the rollicking hip-hop energy of "Through With Love," Destiny's Child sing with a brainwashed sameness as they renounce men for a higher power: "I found a new love/I finally found it in God." They slink back into a man's arms for the closer, "Love," ("Open the path to happiness/Through you I learn to smile again"), but it's a dull romance, entirely unlike the wild affair that resulted when Beyoncé fell madly, dangerously in love, all by herself.

BEN SISARIO

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Lose My Breath," "Girl"

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EN VOGUE
FUNKY DIVAS ATLANTIC

Three's a Crowd

A reunion only serves to dilute Beyoncé's boldness

DESTINY'S CHILD

DESTINY FULFILLED ★★★

COLUMBIA

DOES SHE OR doesn't she? Want to be a solo star, that is. Despite her pledges of devotion to Destiny's Child, Beyoncé Knowles has always seemed one cellphone call away from treating the other two singers like Diana Ross did the Supremes, and leaving for personal glory.

Consider the symbolic message in a photo from her 2003 solo album *Dangerously In Love*: Looking like a billion bucks in a frilly halter top and silk mini, the L'Oréal queen throws her arms in the air and twirls in triplicate; by copying an image of

herself, she replaced co-stars Kelly Rowland and Michelle Williams. By now, after remaking pop music in her image, isn't Beyoncé her own Destiny? Couldn't she do it better herself?

The answer, sadly, seems to be yes. Ever since the Supremes perfected group divatude — the crystalline hybrid of pop and R&B, the almost kinky pyramidal formation, the long, bitchy breakup — no group has matched them, not LaBelle, not Salt-N-Pepa, not En Vogue, not even TLC. Only the bootylicious ones have come close.

Their third album, *Survivor*, streamlined hip-hop soul with playful feminism to create a 21st-century girl-group, but

solo, Beyoncé pushed the formula into racier, bolder, more intimate territory. (Rowland and Williams made albums, too —

the former's included "Dilemma," a huge hit with Nelly — but they're not in the same league.) So the cheerful sister act here is a step backward.

The album kicks off with forceful, womanly eroticism. "Lose My Breath," produced by Rodney Jerkins, with its quick-

THE CHEERFUL SISTER ACT IS A STEP BACKWARD.

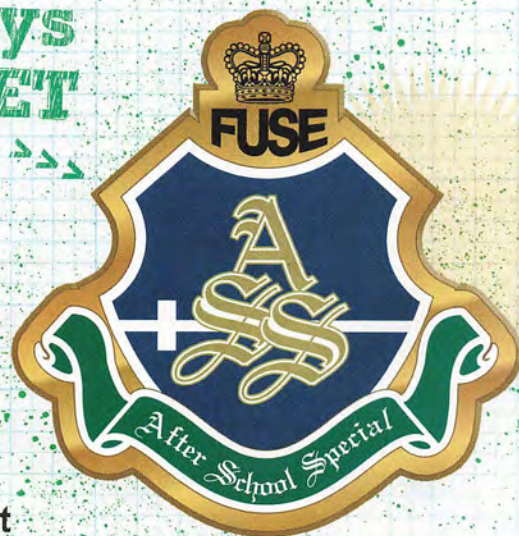
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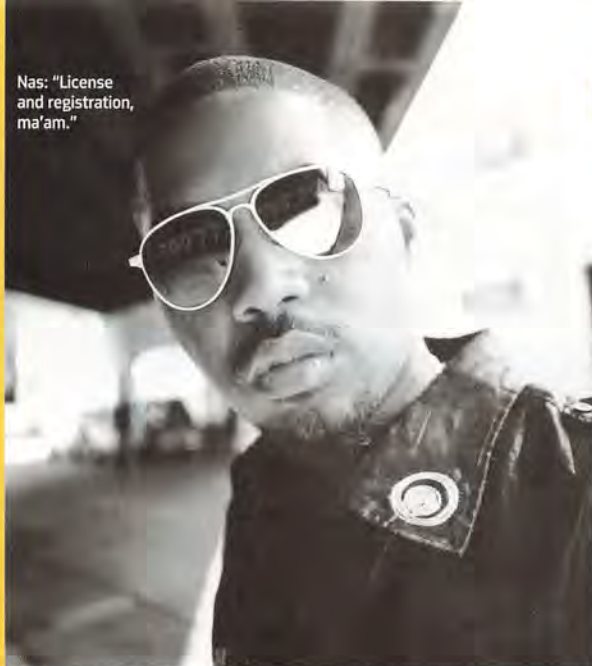
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Nas: "License and registration, ma'am."



Shades of Black

Nas gets hitched, spends a double disc growing up

NAS

STREET'S DISCIPLE

★★★

COLUMBIA

TO BE OR not to be a thug: That is the question Nas has spent his career anguishing over. As a 20-year-old novice on 1994's *Illmatic*, he explored moral dilemmas worthy of a 'hood Hamlet. A few years later, he scrapped nuance and insight for a rapper-as-martyr persona. His mother's death snapped him out of it, though, and on 2002's *God's Son* his egoism sublimated into sermons, telling future B-boys, "Nobody says you have to be gangstas, hos/Read more, learn more, change the globe."

On the first disc of this autobiography, Nas revisits his crucifixion complex. "Nazareth Savage" and "Reason" portray the rapper as a ghetto messiah in his youth. "Nas will prevail," he declares in "The Rest of My Life," his hands still warm from gunfire. The beats throughout are deliciously varied, from the R&B synths of "Just for the Moment" to the stark throw-back "You Know My Style" to the so-bizarre-it-works "In-a-Gadda-da-Vida" sample on "Thief's Theme." Nas's lyrics are among the most morbid

he's written: "Throw carnations at my tombstone," he tells his daughter in "Play On, Playa."

The clouds part once he starts looking for salvation not in power and money, but in other people. With longtime buds Busta Rhymes, Q-Tip and Maxwell, and fiancée Kelis, Nas flips off exes ("Remember the Time"), proposes to his true love ("Gettin' Married") and duets with his father, jazzman Olu Dara ("Bridging the Gap"). Even as Mr. Positive, Nas tends toward self-aggrandizing; you can practically see him nodding

in agreement as Dara calls him the greatest man alive.

The grim closing track, "Live Now," underscores the futility of

gangsta life. We meet Winter, a bitter-voiced moll who caught a disease from the fast life, on her death-bed. "You gotta live now, there's no promise of a second time around," she says, then fades into a flatline. With her, Nas's inner thug dies, and the fledgling family man survives.

BEN SISARIO

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Bridging the Gap," "You Know My Style"

NAS'S CURRENT LISTENING:

GIL SCOTT-HERON/BRIAN JACKSON
FROM SOUTH AFRICA TO SOUTH CAROLINA TVT

ICE CUBE
DEATH CERTIFICATE PRIORITY

NAS'S LYRICS ARE AMONG HIS MOST MORBID.

THE GUIDE NEW RELEASES

cés, the Ramones' "Blitzkrieg Bop" is now a skiffle joyfest for all the family, and ELO's "Livin' Thing" is a tender little thing. It's nobody's first South album (that would be 0898), but grumpy fun all the same.

ANDREW HARRISON

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Don't Stop Moving," "You're the One That I Want," "Livin' Thing"

BUSTED

BUSTED ★★

UNIVERSAL

Pop-punk cuties plot U.S. invasion with boy-band slick and scissor kicks

Meet the Busted! In their U.S. invasion, this U.K. threesome — punkster Matt, poppy James, indie-rock Charlie — aspire to the buzz of early-'60s Beatles liner notes: "They write, play and sing powerhouse music filled with zest and uninhibited good humor, and make listening a sensation-filled joy!" OK, so they're no Beatles, but the teens have hit Brit paydirt with 'N Sync coifs, singalong hooks, and pogo stage shows. Sure it's weird that 12-year-old girls shout lyrics like "Air hostess/I like the way you dress" and holler lusty props to the smokin' 33-year-old teacher Miss McKenzie on "What I Go to School For" — but universal tunes like the self-deprecating "Sleeping With the Light On" and rejection shake-off "You Said No" tuck nicely into the niche between My Little Pony and blink-182.

LAURA SINAGRA

DOWNLOAD THESE: "What I Go to School For," "Sleeping With the Light On"

CHINGY

POWERBALLIN' ★★★★★

DISTURBING THA PEACE/CAPITOL

St. Louis's other party king is not putting on a suit anytime soon

"I like 'em black, white, Puerto Rican or Haitian/Like Japanese, Chinese, or even Asian." Chingy informs the ladies of the world on his irresistibly bouncy single "Balla Baby." Try to correct his geography and he's already off to his hotel room with another couple of girls. With a goofy amalgam of Nelly's good-times provincialism and Snoop Dogg's sleazy whine, Chingy may play the fool, but he's not stupid. The lack of pretense on his second album makes him an approachable Everypimp, and he gets nothing but love from guests R. Kelly, David Banner and Janet Jackson, who coos "Just me and you/Oooh, Chingy" atop the swooning synths and videogame sound effects on "Don't Worry." Like everybody else in Chingy's party suite, she sounds like she's having a blast.

BEN SISARIO

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Balla Baby," "Don't Worry," "We Clubbin'"



Chingy prepares to explode metal-detector.

CIARA

GOODIES ★★★

LA FACE

Don't tell Ciara, but she's a rapper, not a singer



On her breakout hit "Goodies," 18-year-old Ciara is the perfect foil to guest MC Petey Pablo: The

Atlanta singer sounds like she's rapping right back at him, delivering her lines in a measured, sultry cadence with hardly any variation in tone or pitch. Missy Elliott popularized this slippery slope between rapping and singing, and Ciara continues it on "1, 2 Step," where she boasts like she's Lil' Kim: "So retarded/Top charted/Ever since the day I started/Strut my stuff/And yes, I flaunt it." Ciara proves she's a fine singer, but on her debut's best moments — the flirty "Hotline," the delirious downer "Oh," which sounds like a syrup-sipping version of T.I.'s "Rubber Band Man" — she doesn't bother much with notes. The strategy works admirably, proving that genre doesn't mean squat, and melody is overrated, even in R&B.

JON CARAMANICA

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Goodies," "Oh" →

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MAGGIE GYLLENHAAL

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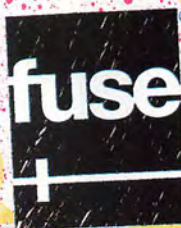
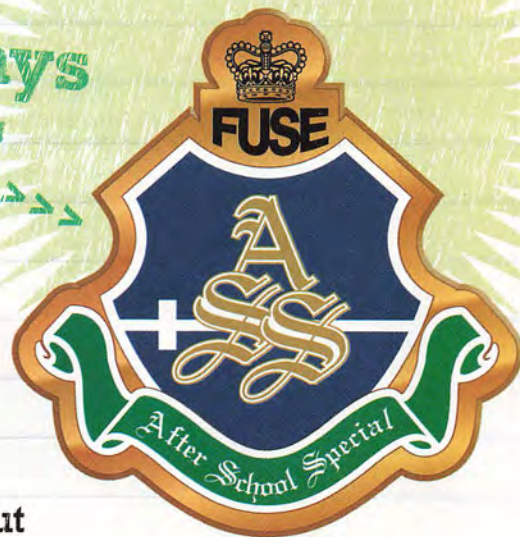
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Stretching Out

Metal band says: Give peace a chance

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eMOTIVE ***

VIRGIN

WAR IS HELL. So are covers albums. But, Maynard James Keenan isn't the kind to be easily deterred. His last album with the artsy metal band Tool boasted a Latin title and an 11-minute song. By comparison, his side-project's set of anti-war favorites by artists including Depeche Mode and Led Zeppelin is as straightforward as the latest *Now* compilation.

Only by comparison, though. Judging from eMOTIVE's weeping strings, nauseous guitars and clanging, factory-tooled drums, George W. Bush's Iraqi misadventures inspire depression more than righteous anger. Nobody expects Keenan to break out party poppers when his theme is so grim, but the mood is as bleak as a Russian winter.

John Lennon's "Imagine" proceeds at the pace of a Soviet state funeral, its shoulders bowed by baleful piano. Nick Lowe's spiky "(What's So Funny 'Bout) Peace, Love & Understanding," which Bill Murray so memorably croons in *Lost In Translation*, is brought glumly to its knees. What's so funny? Nothing, Mr. Keenan,

sir. Apart from a shiveringly beautiful "What's Going On," which posthumously introduces Marvin Gaye to mid-'80s U2 in a shouldn't-work-but-does masterstroke, the first half is less likely to make the listener march in the streets than to curl up in a fetal ball, weeping softly.

Around the midway point, just as APC seem handcuffed to despair, they remember that a good protest song should stir the spirit rather than sink it. Devo's anthemic "Freedom of Choice" and Fear's gleefully satirical "Let's Have A War" ("Let's have a war! We could all use the money!") are as indignant as Michael Moore on election night, while the Nine Inch Nails-style grind of the self-penned "Counting Bodies Like Sheep to the Rhythm of the War Drum" (catchy title!) shudders with fury. For APC, it's clearly more fruitful to rage against the machine than to sulk in its general direction.

DORIAN LYNKEY

DOWNLOAD THESE: "What's Going On," "Freedom of Choice," "Let's Have a War"

MAYNARD JAMES KEENAN'S CURRENT LISTENING:

PJ HARVEY
UH KUH HER ISLAND

BURNING BRIDES
LEAVE NO ASHES V2

DAMIEN DEMPSEY

SEIZE THE DAY ***

ATTACK

Irishman signed to Morrissey's label has a folksinger's heart and a rapper's indignation

A one-time boxer, Damien Dempsey attacks his songs like he's hitting a heavy bag. Whether it's greed and deprivation in his hometown of Dublin, or denunciations of Ireland's old adversaries, the British, the message is pummeled with more strength than finesse. His complaints of oppression and dysfunction could be a bore, except that he has a distinctive voice. (Admirers Brian Eno and Sinéad O'Connor lend subtle assistance.) Loud and proud, Dempsey declaims over choppy acoustic guitar in the back-street accent of a pub performer, and his melodies have the drama of Irish folk tunes. He's also a product of the hip-hop age, ranting in rap rhythms when he feels like it. If these songs were a landscape painting, there would be misty hills in the distance and a drug-infested tenement to the fore.

PAUL DU NOYER

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Ghosts of Overdoses," "Jar Song"

DIRTY VEGAS

ONE *

CAPITOL

New development worth ignoring: Dance music goes adult-oriented

This English trio's self-titled 2002 debut made the combination of dance beats and rock guitars feel surprisingly cozy and calm. It also won a Grammy and sold a million copies, aided by Mitsubishi's TV campaign using "Days Go By." Still, it was snapping street-punk compared to the follow-up. Pinpointing the worst element here is tricky: The hokey tunes of a million AOR nightmares? Or the jarringly stupid lyrics (on "Walk Into the Sun," overly

earnest singer Steve Smith informs, "Lately, I've been feeling different/ Like I've come from outer space")? Oh, but let's not ignore the sound; less like, say, Underworld than Richard Marx being persuaded by his accountant to go electronic. If this exhaustingly awful album repeats its predecessor's success, the world will seem more confusing than ever.

STEVE LOWE

DOWNLOAD THIS: None

THE FUTUREHEADS

THE FUTUREHEADS ***

STARTIME INTERNATIONAL/SIRE

Franz Ferdinand tourmates create new genre: art-school barbershop

On their snappy debut, the Futureheads sing in an unapologetically British accent (via Sunderland) and recall any number of home-grown new-wave acts, including XTC, the Jam and Gang of Four (whose guitarist Andy Gill produces some tracks here). But the four young, big-thinking guys have plenty of weirdo ideas of their own, employing four-part harmonies and stop-start dynamics to dizzying effect. With 15 songs splattered across 36 minutes, the Futureheads barely pause for a breath, fantasizing about life as an android ("Robot"), covering art-pop heartthrob Kate Bush ("Hounds of Love") and even singing a cappella ("Danger of the Water"). The →



Dirty Vegas: Really bad at hide-and-seek.

Damien Dempsey: Folkie by day, Taebo aficionado by night.

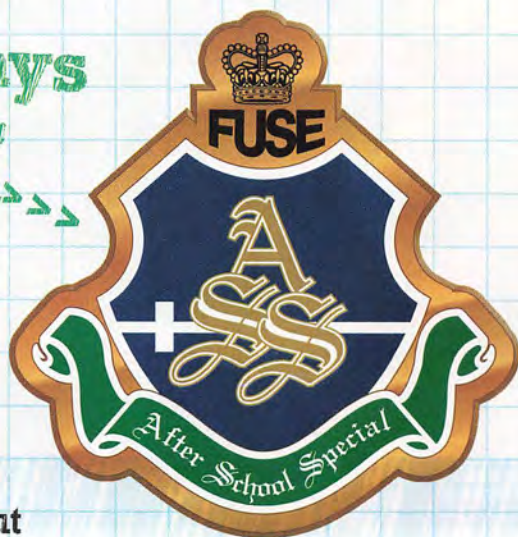


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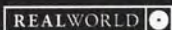
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Simple Plan:
"You want an
ass-whooping, eh?"



The Un-Punks

Canadian stars mix blink with Backstreet

SIMPLE PLAN

STILL NOT GETTING ANY . . .

★★★

LAVA

AFTER THREE MILLION in sales and several Top-10 singles, you can be sure this cute Montreal fivesome is getting some. More likely, the title *Still Not Getting Any . . .* is a nod to the frustrations of hormonal TRL viewers who put Simple Plan on top. On their second CD, they work with Bon Jovi producer Bob Rock, proving once and for all that they have no credibility. What's less punk than Bon Jovi?

To their credit, they could not care less about cred. Simple Plan have streamlined the volatile formula blink-182 brought to the mainstream. Their rallying cries introduce ballad-like touches: a melancholy bridge ("Perfect World"), or wistful lead guitar threaded through furious chords ("Crazy").

Seemingly introspective tracks like "Everytime" erupt into blowout choruses. In just about every song, power-chord kicks disguise Pierre Bouvier's banal complaints. ("No one likes to share/I guess life's unfair." You don't say!) Even Bouvier's voice, both geekily nasal and technically

potent, is at once empathetic and empowering.

There are flourishes to the formula, too. "Perfect World" opens with a cannily chosen beat, and acoustic guitar peeks from "Welcome To My Life" like sunbeams through a storm. Unlike their forebears, there's nothing idiosyncratic about them. The upside is that, like boy bands, any track could be the next single; every song has hooks so polished you can see your reflection in them.

So they are rootless: Their best song and only ballad, "Untitled," sounds like Foreigner's '70s stadium rock. Floating

THEIR BEST SONG SOUNDS LIKE FOREIGNER.

in a sea of strings and piano parted only by a satisfying guitar solo, Bouvier signals both torture and relief, sounding utterly at home. Simple Plan are gluttons for the pleasure of release, a quality they picked up from an earlier generation of wound-up punk. Though that's also the only quality to which they've remained loyal.

NICK CATUCCI

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Untitled," "Welcome to My Life"

PIERRE BOUVIER'S CURRENT LISTENING:

THE USED
IN LOVE AND DEATH REPRISE

MY CHEMICAL ROMANCE
THREE CHEERS FOR . . . REPRISE.

proceedings get a little bit samey, but the band's fearless optimism and knack for a bookish groove are hard to deny.

ROSS RAIHALA

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Decent Days and Nights," "Carnival Kids"

THE GAME

UNTOLD STORY ***

FASTLIFE

The early work of 50 Cent's shot-five-times crew member, now working with Dr. Dre

Before he was dodging bullets as a member of G-Unit, the Game honed

his chops with Bay Area underground legend JT The Bigga Figga. JT's got a good ear, and he's shrewd, rushing this unreleased collection to market before the Game's proper Dr. Dre-directed debut drops this winter. Game shows sparks of true skill in his polysyllabic rhyme schemes ("Who the Illest," "Drama Is Real") and in starting beef (with Jay-Z underling Memphis Bleek on "Bleek Is . . ."). But most of these tracks sound like the demos they are — unimaginative, plodding beats topped with muddy rhymes. Anyhow, Game had his eyes on a bigger prize. "Who's really the best rapper since Pac got killed?" he wonders on "When Shit Get Thick." "Ask me that question when I cop my deal." OK, we're waiting.

JON CARAMANICA

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Drama Is Real," "Compton Compton"

HOLLY GOLIGHTLY

SLOWLY BUT SURELY **

DAMAGED GOODS

Jack White's folksy homegirl cooks up some dull virginal jams

After a dozen albums and a duet spot on the last White Stripes album, the British chanteuse's lilt has been

Holly Golightly: "Anyone for 'Kumbaya'?"



dubbed "garage rock" so often you might almost believe it. But it better resembles the fantasy purity of '60s Brit-folk lasses, sung as if the dirty blues only happened to all the young dudes. Murmuring statically between intimate and amateur, her plain ditties of pale romanticism pre-rock around the clock, or at least from teatime to the early hours of morning. Named for an Audrey Hepburn character, our heroine does

not go lightly off to breakfast at Tiffany's. But there is a deep blue something to her unaffected singing style, a vague sadness combining with walking bass guitar and electric organ to mourn how entirely she's out of time.

RENE VIENET

DOWNLOAD THIS: "Keeping On"

THE GOURDS

BLOOD OF THE RAM ***

ELEVEN THIRTY

Noodly Austin five-piece returns with apocalyptic musings and odes to fried pork

Sharp-eared downloaders know the Gourds for their bluegrass sendup of Snoop Dogg's "Gin and Juice," a P2P favorite that beat Bubba Sparxxx to hick-hop by two full years. Their seventh full-length is just as playful, full of spry bayou fiddling, jammy mandolins and backwoods wordplay, and though they could stand to cut back on the poop jokes, when it works, it's deadpan hillbilly humor nonpareil ("Married my cousin up in Arkansas/Married two more when I got to Utah"). The Gourds are strange even when they're serious: "Escalade" condemns gas-guzzling SUVs with buttery falsetto soul, →

From left: Sara De Boer/Retna Ltd.; Courtesy of Damaged Goods

I LOVE THIS CD!



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ACTOR IN SAW,
THE PRINCESS
BRIDE

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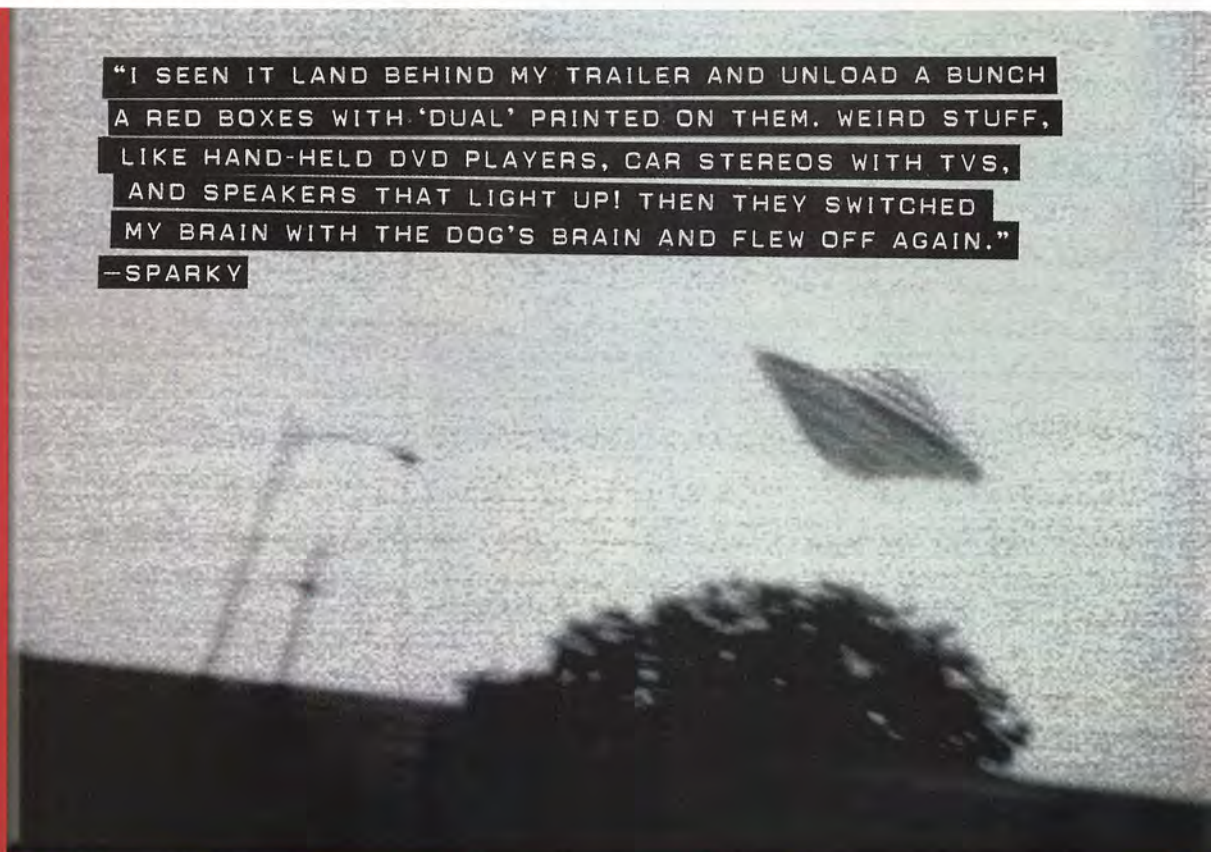


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—SPARKY



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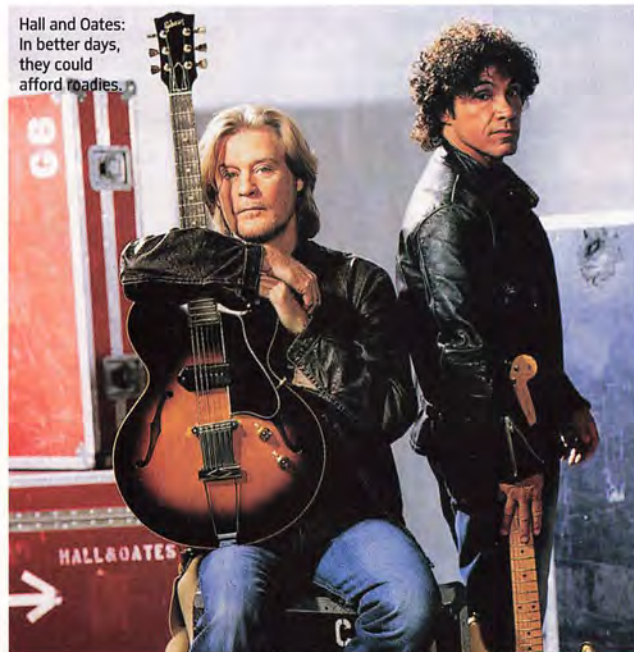
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Hall and Oates:
In better days,
they could
afford roadies.



while the title track constructs a gothic self-mythology about the end of days and being "washed in the blood of the ram." Like Phish, only deep-fried.

JOSH EELLS

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Lower 48,"
"Escalade"

HALL AND OATES

OUR KIND OF SOUL ★★

U-WATCH

In their latest attempt at career repair, Philly ex-superstars open a treasure chest of '60s and '70s soul

Since forever (or at least the '80s), through a series of agonizing come-back tries, material has been Sore Subject Number One for the blue-eyed soul duo Hall and Oates. This long-overdue songbook sidesteps that problem, placing three forgettable originals alongside tidy (sometimes overweeningly worshipful) covers from the golden age of soul, including such Philly standards as the Spinners' "I'll Be Around" and the Stylistics' "You Are Everything," early-'70s hits whose authoritative vocal performances make them practically impossible to interpret. Recognizing this, the ever-rhapsodic lead singer Hall tiptoes timidly through the familiar melodies; while his homages aren't radical or stunning, even the ludicrous lunges (such as Barry White's "Can't Get Enough of Your Love") are delivered with an old-school, pre-ProTools passion.

TOM MOON

DOWNLOAD THIS: "I'll Be Around"

ISIS

PANOPTICON ★★★

IPECAC

Boston crew level metal clichés with most deft album yet

This personnel-shifting collective are as heavy metal as they are hippie-dippy. While they're named for the Egyptian fertility goddess, signaling that they're earthy stoners, Isis borrowed their third album's title from a 1787 philosophy book describing the perfect prison (insert devil horns here).

Frontman Aaron Turner conducts seven long and longer compositions: The shortest track, "Wills Dissolve," coils for nearly seven minutes, while "Altered Course" creeps for 10

minutes into utter deterioration. Though grounded in black metal's hoarse-vocal, coarse-guitar style, the music's guttural edge routinely evaporates into fluttering feedback or vaporous fuzz. Almost as an afterthought, Turner hacks out →

ASTONISHING FACT!

Mike Gallagher, the guitarist for Isis, also works as a carpenter. On the job, he has accidentally cut off several of his fingertips!



GIOVANNI
RIBISI
ACTOR IN SKY
CAPTAIN AND THE
WORLD OF ...

I LOVE THIS CD!

DEVENDRA BANHART
REJOICING IN THE
HANDS
YOUNG GOD

"I like the fact that he's been a squatter. And he records on a four-track tape player."

Snoop Dogg: "Tune in next week for another episode of *Tales from the Crip*."

Dogg and Pussy

Snoop dims the lights and sparks the scented candles

SNOOP DOGG

**R&G (RHYTHM & GANGSTA):
THE MASTERPIECE ★★**

DOGGYSTYLE/GEFFEN

TIME WAS, Gs didn't make any concessions to the ladies. If women were acknowledged in gangsta's early-'90s heyday, they popped up in songs as schlong repositories, in skits making sucking sounds and — if you were Eazy-E — in fantasies as transvestites about to be castrated by a semiautomatic. As Snoop Dogg said on "Gin and Juice": "We don't love them hos."

Today, thugs can't ship platinum if they don't fawn over some lucky lady. And 11 years after his debut, Snoop devotes nearly an entire CD to seducing, swooning over and generally loving hos. "It ain't about me," he purrs on "Perfect." "It's all about you."

Pharrell sets most of the backdrops. A reformed meanie himself, he's left the razor-edged assaults of the past for classy, sensual jazz-funk dross. The Neptunes' gift is percussive, not melodic, so the romantic heavy lifting falls on Snoop. His flirtations are mostly asinine, autopilot-Lothario stuff ("I don't know if you've been told, but you look like

you should be gold") but his voice is, as always, a hypnotic melt of menace and charisma. Occasionally, the humor of *Doggy Fizzle Televizzle* sneaks in, as when he tells a woman to "spend a week with the black Jack Tripper."

The two most exciting songs are exceptions. "Drop It Like It's Hot" is the finest, oddest Pharrell beat since Kelis's "Milkshake." It's a pop-and-lock of Zulu-style mouth clicks, snares and soft electronic hiss, inspiring Snoop to scrap boudoir talk for Crips, nudity and AK-47s. Produced by Lil Jon, "Step Yo Game

Up" is stunningly polarized: Crunk panic revs high while Snoop dips low and casual. If some songs push loverman blandness into overdrive, this one adds raunch. Lil Jon: "Rub that shit, it's yours, bitch! Grab his dick, it's yours, bitch!" Which, for a semi-reformed G, is something close to feminism.

JONAH WEINER

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Step Yo Game Up," "Drop It Like It's Hot"

SNOOP DOGG'S CURRENT LISTENING:

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howls or roars like Cookie Monster. For fans of fertility, they sure sound like destruction.

NICK CATUCCI

DOWNLOAD THESE: "So Did We," "Wills Dissolve"

ALAN JACKSON

WHAT I DO ★★☆☆

ARISTA NASHVILLE

Nashville King raises his own gold standard

COUNTRY'S
BEST
SINGER

Throughout the '90s, this native Georgian remade classic country in his own easygoing image. Then, following 9/11, he went further, capturing a nation's feelings of psychic illness with "Where Were You (When the World Stopped Turning)," an across-the-board hit. This collection, his 14th, could be the best album he's ever made. Far from trading on his success with current events, he digs deep into the everyday particulars at which he has long excelled, with flowing songs about loneliness, high-fat diets, auto repair, religion and media. The beauty is the disturbed love ballad "Rainy Day In June." The whole collection, though, shows

how much subtle pathos, humor, and passion a flat-brilliant country performer can harvest from non-strict traditionalism.

JAMES HUNTER

DOWNLOAD THESE: "USA Today," "If French Fries Were Fat Free," "The Talkin' Song Repair Blues"

MICK JAGGER AND DAVE STEWART

ALFIE: MUSIC FROM THE MOTION PICTURE ★

VIRGIN

Stones frontman joins with Eurythmics producer for filmwork — but they really want to direct

When remaking *Alfie*, the '60s film about a young, sophisticated cad, who better to write the soundtrack than Mick Jagger, who may as well have been the model for the title role? The problem is that Jagger is a preeminent laurel-rester, and this new music isn't any exception: It's deflated by its imitation of records he took part in before his work leveled off 20 years ago." The top-billed "Blind Leading the Blind" and "Old Habits Die Hard" (the first in two versions, the second in three versions, amid a 15-song track list) are faux-Stones soul clichés with

Wyclef Jean regrets not wearing his other chin.



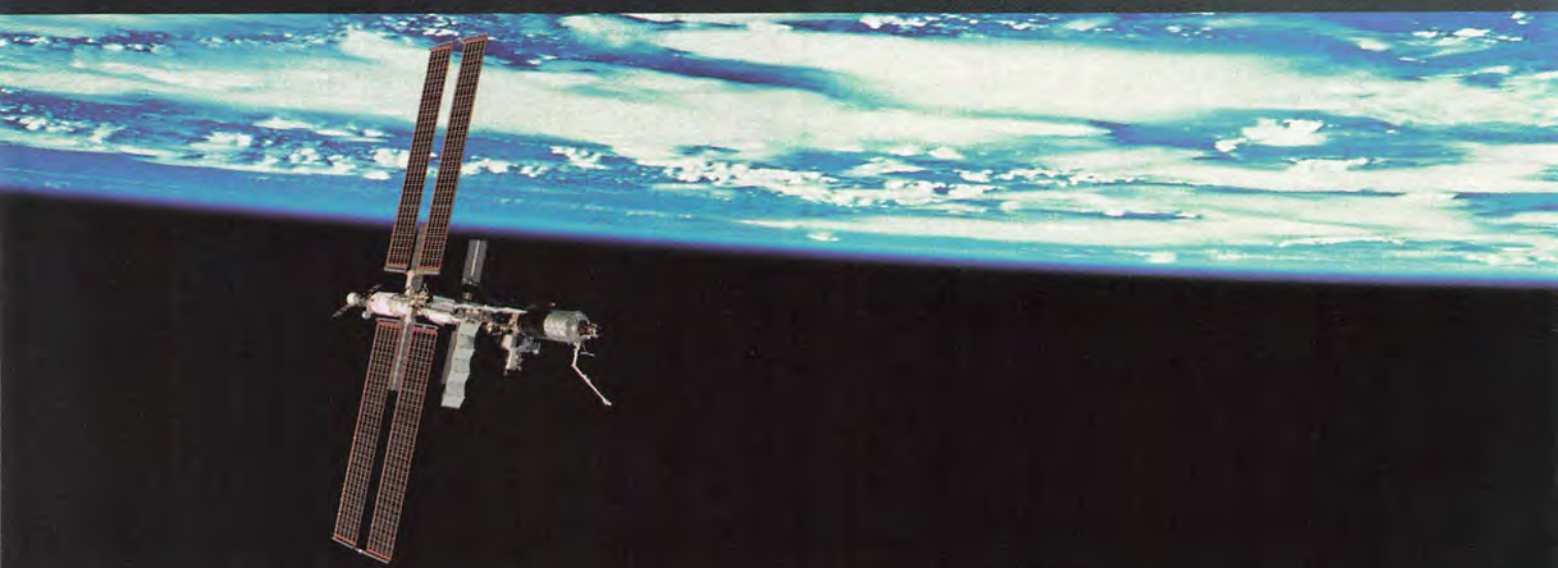
puzzlingly bad lyrics: "When the chips are down and you've landed on your feet/You're standing up and walking, but you know you are dead meat." The incidental music bites Stonesy atmosphere from their *Beggars Banquet* and *Let It Bleed* albums, complete with rock-gospel

choruses. And if you're wondering whether Jagger can navigate the tricky singing of the film's famous title song — bad luck: It was outsourced to the over-emoting Joss Stone.

BEN RATLIFF

DOWNLOAD THIS: None

Courtesy of Sam Pasé



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WYCLEF JEAN

WELCOME TO HAITI: CREOLE 101 ★★★

SAK PASÉ/KOCH

Ex-Fugee wishes Haiti a happy bicentennial with heartfelt fifth album

NICE!
NOW
REUNITE
THE
FUGEES

Buried at the end of his first solo album (1997's *The Carnival*) were three of Wyclef's best songs. "Jaspora," "YeLe" and "Carnival" took the NYC-via-Haiti hip-hop Jean pioneered with his former (and perhaps future?) group and spiced it up with Creole lyrics and Caribbean soul. Now, seven years and three disappointing records later, he's back on the island. Ditching the rapping he was never very good at and the eclecticism that always sounded forced, Jean goes for pure sentiment, singing the joy ("Fistibal — Festival") and the sorrow ("Nou Va Rive") of his beleaguered motherland. And while just what he's singing is a mystery to anyone not fluent in *Kréyol*, the pulsing bass of "Lavi New York" should get *dèyès* shaking in any language.

JOSH EELLS

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Nou Va Rive," "Lavi New York"



Juanes: "I am here for your girlfriends."

FREEDY JOHNSTON

THE WAY I WERE ★★★

BAR/NONE

A casual, living-room look at one of rock's great, disturbing songwriters

Most juvenilia albums are arguments for abortion. Tom Waits, Steely Dan and Mr. Bob Dylan are just three of the titans betrayed by the belated delivery of their premature gestation. So there's wisdom in expecting nothing from these 1988–1991 demos by a Kansas-born, Hoboken,

New Jersey-based singer-songwriter who earned a cult following with 1992's perfect *Can You Fly*. Only this time, wisdom proves to be cynicism. Long on strummed guitar and pro forma drums, the music here is so negligible it leaves extra room for songwriting looser than on his rigorously conceived official oeuvre. And the songs stick, from the wacked-out assertion that his honey isn't jailbait at the beginning to the one-riff battle against loneliness at the end.

ROBERT CHRISTGAU

DOWNLOAD THESE: "I Got the Papers Right Here," "Friend in the City"

JUANES

MI SANGRE ★★★

SURCO/UNIVERSAL LATINO

Colombian rock star gets drunk on love with a third album of mushy ballads for the *muchachitas*

Juanes delivered some impassioned lyrics about the civil war that still rages in his native Colombia on his inventive 2000 solo debut album *Fijate Bien*. Using his heavy metal guitar chops, he created an infectious tropical-rock sound that made him an overnight Latin pop star. As with 2002's, *Un Día Normal*, this

year's *Mi Sangre* (*My Blood*) only hints at current events: "I dream of peace in my people's bloodied land," he sighs on the rock prayer "Sueños" (which means "dreams"). But mostly, the punch is gone. He plays up his heartthrob dreaminess with sappy love songs instead. His nuanced singing only takes off only on a minority of edgy Caribbean-inflected tracks ("Amame," "La Camisa Negra," "Dámelo"), but you have to skip through the mushy violins to get to them.

ENRIQUE LAVIN

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Dámelo," "Amame," "La Camisa Negra" →

I LOVE THIS CO!



SANDRA BERNHARD
ACTRESS AND
COMEDIAN, IN
ZOOGLANDER

ROSANNE CASH RULES OF TRAVEL CAPITOL

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Trick Daddy:
"L'Chaim to
you, too!"



Uplifting!

Miami thug loves children, but not in the R. Kelly way

TRICK DADDY

THUG MATRIMONY: MARRIED TO THE STREETS ★★

SLIP-N-SLIDE/ATLANTIC

IF HIS RAP career falls apart, Trick Daddy can always turn to brand management. Most of his album titles have riffed off the word "thug" — his best title was *www.thug.com*, closely followed by *Book of Thugs: Chapter AK Verse 47*. And much of his material is just as consistent in its commitment to a theme.

But like Walt Whitman, Trick Daddy contains multitudes. The rapper's most indelible moment came two years ago on "In da Wind," where he screeched "Trick luuuuhh the kids!" And he proves it once more on *Thug Matrimony*, his impressive sixth album. On "These Are the Daze," he turns surprisingly into a social conservative, telling kids not to cuss in front of old folks: "I know mama taught you better than that." "I Wanna Sang" is practically a sequel to Nas's "I Can": "There's another Michael Jordan, Tiger Woods/Somewhere right in the 'hood.'"

But the *coup de grace* is "The Children's Song," which samples a pre-teen gospel

choir, an audacious move for a man who calls himself Trick Daddy Dollars. It's so jarring you might miss the worthy message: "Black America still starving, living in public housing/That's why one of every three black boys end up in the County."

Not everything is so noble. The naughty Khia-assisted "J.O.D.D." bubbles with minimal electro, and the steroidal crunk-metal single "Let's Go" samples the guitar riff to Ozzy's "Crazy

Train" and features Lil Jon's astral howls. Trick's always had an ear for beats: excellent post-marching band

bounce on "Fuckin' Around" and the brass-heavy posse cut "Down Wit da South," which sounds like a meeting of Southern superheroes.

Ultimately, that's what Trick wants to be. "See, papa was a rolling stone," he murmurs on "Gangsta Livin'." "He said, 'Son, get your gun/There's a war/It's on.'" For Trick, the line between thug and hero is thin indeed.

JON CARAMANICA

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Let's Go," "J.O.D.D.," "The Children's Song"

TRICK DADDY'S CURRENT LISTENING:

CRIME MOB
CRIME MOB BME/REPRISE

LIL SCRAPPY & TRILLVILLE
THE KING OF CRUNK... BME/REPRISE

JOHN LEGEND

GET LIFTED ★★

COLUMBIA

Kanye West's homey delivers a throwback R&B debut

IF ALICIA KEYS WERE A DUDE

As if the cable-knit sweaters weren't proof enough that Kanye West is one classy cat, he's rolled out protégé John Legend. A piano-playing loverman who wears blazers and sings unadorned, '70s-indebted soul, Legend hasn't a trace of crassness: he'd rather talk up a girl over soy lattes than bump 'n' grind in R. Kelly's guesthouse. On "Let's Get Lifted" he compares his love to a hallucinogen, and when he promises reform to a girlfriend ("I Can Change"), you actually believe him. Padded out with guitar sprinkles, strings, and hip-hop backbeats, the arrangements are spare but bouncy. Lest Legend's smoooveness turn snoozefest, he scuffs up his music with a slight rock howl or drops in a line about drinking too much and picking fights with girls' boyfriends. Which is more edge than most men in khakis can claim.

JONAH WEINER

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Number One," "Used to Love U"

LES GEORGES LENINGRAD

LES TRACES DE BLACK ESKIMO ★★

ALIEN8

Montreal weirdos figure out how to dance with three left feet

Les Georges Leningrad are a performance-art trio first and a band second, but for their second album, they've recast themselves as the kind of dissonant disco act that fueled freaky dance parties in the early '80s. Frontwoman Poney P. whimpers and yowls like an irritated alley cat with a Vocoder, backed by galloping live drums, an occasional stab of harsh guitar, and gut-shaking synthesizers. There are too many beatless noise interludes, but the band cranks up the ridiculousness factor until it works, and their

I LOVE THIS CD:



BILLY BOB THORNTON
ACTOR IN FRIDAY NIGHT LIGHTS

J.J. CALE NATURALLY

MERCURY

"Anybody under 30 who hasn't heard of him needs to. He's one of the musical geniuses of our time, and he doesn't get the attention he should."

best songs have a giggly, so-unfunky-they're-funky groove. If you feel like you've stumbled uninvited into a bacchanal where everyone's wearing giant puppet heads and doing the robot dance, that's probably intentional.

DOUGLAS WOLK

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Supa Doopa," "Black Eskimo"

GERALD LEVERT

DO I SPEAK FOR THE WORLD?

★★

ELEKTRA

R&B crooner's set is not for young 'uns

Gerald Levert is the epitome of what BET calls "grown-folks' music" (pale grown folks call it "adult contemporary"). Not just because Levert — whose father, Eddie, sang with soul masters the O'Jays — has been churning out R&B jams for two decades, but because he sounds like he has: Unlike the ultra-smooth Casanovas of contemporary R&B, Levert has the guttural, full-bodied voice of a man, not a blinged-out playa. His beats here are basic, letting his vocal range — earnest

("Lay U Down"), devout ("Greater Later"), seductive ("One Million Times"), wistful ("Everyday") — do the work. As one track bleeds into another, though, you start craving some sounds of youth: snazzier beats, slicker hooks, guest vocals — anything to inject a little zest into the musical maturity.

BAZ DREISINGER

DOWNLOAD THIS: "Talk It Out"

CERY MATTHEWS

COCKAHOOP ★★★

ROUGH TRADE

Former Britpop queen invents Country 'n' Welsh

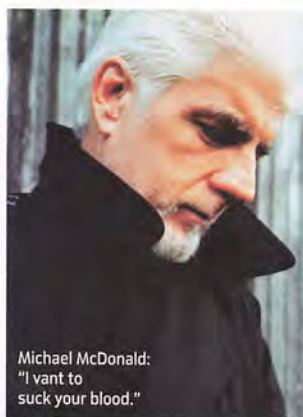
Britain's Celtic fringes have an affinity for country music that can only be

explained by shared experiences with poverty, moonshine and gigantic, intermarried families. In the mid-'90s Cerys Matthews was the voice of Catatonia,

the Welsh Blondie, and her woozy, boozy, nicotine-brown voice was the band's most distinctive feature. One rehabbed sauce problem and a transition to Nashville later, she's making blowsy survivor's coun-

ASTONISHING FACT!

Gourds drummer Keith Langford once caught an 85-pound blue catfish with a fishing pole fashioned from a cymbal stand! Top that, Keith Moon.



Michael McDonald:
"I want to
suck your blood."

MICHAEL McDONALD

MOTOWN 2 ★★

MOTOWN

White-haired soul singer manages the neat trick of making the '60s sound boring

The garbled cry of the one-time Doobie Brothers singer and pianist remains as thick with earnest passion as it was three decades ago. Hearing it is like gulping from a fountain of Hershey's chocolate syrup. That vocal richness is the redeeming feature of this tepid sequel to McDonald's first album of Motown standards, a surprise million-seller and Grammy nominee released last year. His band can't come close to recreating the dynamism and textures of the original hits; on the Four Tops' "Reach Out I'll Be There" and Stevie Wonder's "I Was Made to Love Her," the beats plod, and the arrangements of Marvin Gaye classics from *What's Going On* are thin and lackluster. Only Smokey Robinson's "The Tracks of My Tears," filtered through cool Doobie Brothers harmonies, sounds fresh.

STEPHEN HOLDEN

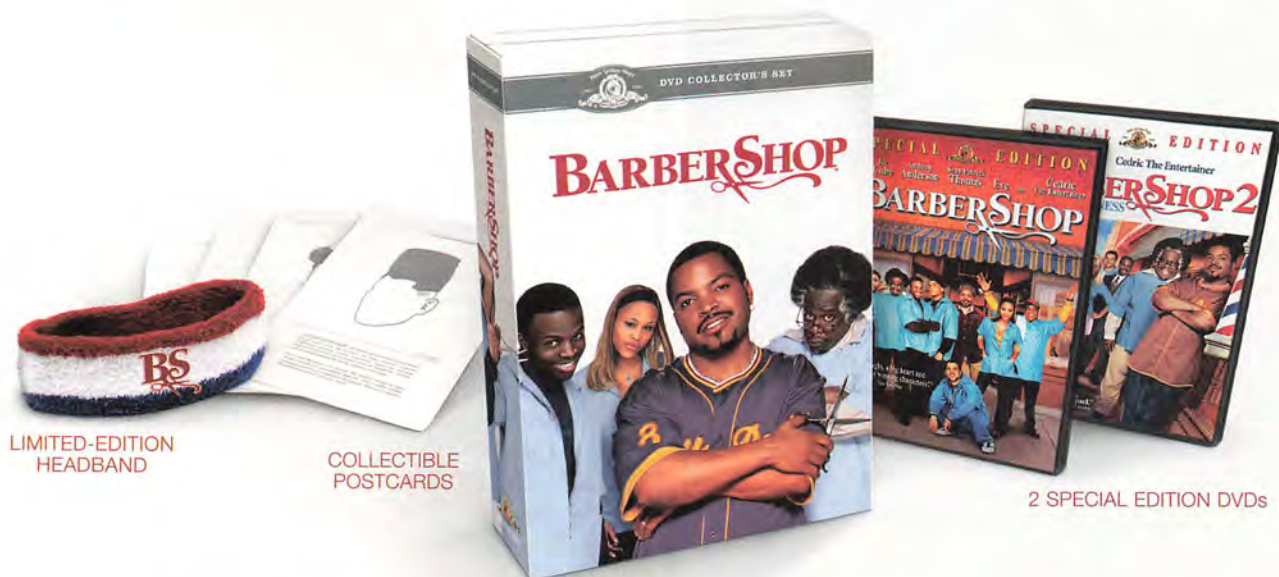
DOWNLOAD THIS: "The Tracks of My Tears" →

try that suits her far better. Combining bluegrass with lo-fi modern country, this solo debut is so intimate and understated that you can hear every squeak on the ukulele. Battered but thoroughly endearing, Cerys hymns her former addictions (love, escape, white wine), covers Hugh Cornwell and the Handsome Family and comes out triumphant, like a better-adjusted Marianne Faithfull.

ANDREW HARRISON

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Chardonnay," "If You're Lookin' For Love," "Arglwydd Dyma Fi"

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THE GUIDE NEW RELEASES

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"All hail Satan —
and Pert Plus."



MESHUGGAH

I ★★★★★

FRACTURED TRANSMITTER

**Swedish quartet create whiplash
metal that math nerds can't resist**

Headbangers awestruck by Tool's intricate metal arrangements might faint if exposed to Meshuggah, long the kingpins of Nordic grindcore. *I* consists of one 21-minute sprint through a maze of tempo changes, many of which require an advanced degree in mathematics to suss out. The brain-scrambling pleasure is never compromised, largely because drummer Tomas Haake is a quad-limbed beast: He treats the trap kit like an orchestra, but he isn't precious about it. When maximum thrust is required, Haake floors it and the band fights to keep from getting trampled. The only drawback is the generic "this furnace of limitless hate" vocals. Otherwise, the instrumental acrobatics make Meshuggah the year's best soundtrack for air drumming.

GREG KOT

DOWNLOAD THIS: "I"

NORTH MISSISSIPPI ALLSTARS

HILL COUNTRY REVIEW ★★★

TONE-COOL/ATO

**Psychedelic choogle from an
expanded trio with no fear of long-
ass solos**

"All right, 2004!" the North Mississippi Allstars declare at the beginning of their first live album, the only clue that it wasn't actually made 10, 20 or, most believably, 30

years ago. The CD was recorded at this year's Bonnaroo festival, which, like the '60s, if you can remember, you weren't really at. The Dickinson brothers — Luther on guitar, Cody on drums — lead this extravagant Southern jam-band expertly, if at times interminably, with noodling assistance from the likes of Widespread Panic's JoJo Herman and Chris Robinson of the Black

Crowes. Robinson's soulful take on the old Ry Cooder track "Boomer's Story" stands as a fitting highlight: The Dickinsons' father, Jim, not only

produced the original version 32 years ago, but also is another onstage guest performer.

CLARK COLLIS

DOWNLOAD THIS: "Boomer's Story"

PITTY SING

**DEMONS, YOU ARE THE
STARS IN CARS 'TIL I DIE**

★★★

OR

**Brooklyn-via-Boston foursome's
second EP is music for Molly Ringwald
to fall in love to**

Remember 1986, when John Hughes ruled the multiplex, shimmering synths ruled the airwaves, and boys sang like girls? Pitty Sing do. The Berklee School of Music alums — named after the cat in a Flannery O'Connor short story — kick off this five-track EP with "Radio," a slice of *Pretty In Pink*-style English pop whose puckish refrain ("We'll fuck on the radioooo/We make it go whoo-oh-ohhh") pretty much guarantees it'll never bless the medium they serenade. Next comes the swooning "We're On Drugs," with Manchester-



Pitty Sing, on the worst MTV Cribs ever.

bred frontman Paul Holmes at his melodramatic, exploitative, New Romantic best. Songs three and four drag, but when the credits roll with an edited version of "Radio" that substitutes "touch" for "fuck," it's a happy ending for everyone. Even the FCC.

JOSH EELLS

DOWNLOAD THESE: "We're On Drugs," "Radio"

THE ROLLING STONES

LIVE LICKS ★★

VIRGIN

Another half-decent but unnecessary live album from the former World's Greatest Band

The expertise of the Rolling Stones isn't rock and roll anymore — it's the ability to wring every last dollar out of a tour. Their 40 Licks tour of 2002-

2003 already yielded a hits anthology and a four-DVD box, so this perfunctory document was inevitable. Disc one gathers autopilot versions of jacked-up stadium hits ("Street Fighting Man" and "Gimme Shelter" still shine, but Sheryl Crow proves she's no "Honky Tonk Woman"), while the second disc holds less-familiar gems, including the snarled "Monkey Man." Mick Jagger dispenses a convincing blues howl on "Rock Me, Baby," but then R&B giant Solomon Burke sits in ("Everybody Needs Somebody To Love") and Jagger's cred disappears. The lowlight is Keith Richards's stumbling treatment of "The Nearness of You," which turns the Stones into a schmaltzy, disoriented wedding band. Of all things.

TOM MOON

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Monkey Man," "Can't You Hear Me Knocking"

SHADOWS FALL

THE WAR WITHIN ★★★

CENTURY MEDIA

Massachusetts longhairs are the scariest things from New England since Larry Bird's short-shorts

On 2002's breakout album *The Art of Balance*, Shadows Fall became one of indie metal's top-selling acts with brittle, nouveau thrash palatable to more than just dudes who can belch the entire Slayer catalog. Their brusque speed metal, as technical as the flight manual to a 747, is leavened by a singer who isn't afraid to channel his inner-Eddie Vedder. And they further bridge the gap between underground and mainstream on their fourth LP, *The War Within*, with acoustic interludes, gruff but decipherable growls, and inspirational lyrics cribbed from the self-help section at Waldenbooks. Stadium-sized anthem "What Drives the Weak" sets the bar high: Bullying guitars and a caffeine-abetted beat rocket into a cleanly sung chorus that's big enough to require its own zip code.

JASON BRACELIN

DOWNLOAD THESE: "The Light That Blinds," "What Drives the Weak"

SUPER FURRY ANIMALS

PHANTOM PHORCE ★★★

PLACID CASUAL/BEGGARS GROUP

Perverse Welsh pop brainiacs deliver droll concept album

Last year's *Phantom Power* was a minor epiphany of lush psychedelic pop sophistication camouflaging some Mess O' Potamian dread about American political aggression. Now, perversely, the Animals have submitted it to 15 remixers, ranging from glitch-funking Killa Kela to the High Llamas, a simpatico '60s-retro group, then wrapped the whole deconstructed enchilada in the sub-*Spinal Tap* commentary of *Power* executive producer Kurt Stern, who claims →

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THE GUIDE NEW RELEASES

Super Furry Animals:
"Welsh raves are not
all they're cracked
up to be."



to have "rescued the album from the cut-out bin." Stern mocks their Beach Boys fetish in his intro to digitalist Zan Lyons's bombastic "Out of Control" and waxes pompous about Four Tet's dreamy extension of Power's standout "The Piccolo Snare." But even the most contrarian cut-ups can't obscure the original's honeydew delights.

RICHARD GEHR

DOWNLOAD THESE: "The Piccolo Snare," "Hello Sunshine"

VARIOUS ARTISTS

MOOG: ORIGINAL FILM SOUNDTRACK ***

HOLLYWOOD

Pioneering synth wizard saluted by
two generations of keyboard wonks

Robert Moog's synthesizers have been the sound of the Space Age for 40 years. His machines created mechanical, wobbly tones unlike any earlier keyboard, and musicians have fetishized them ever since. When you hear a synth whooshing and squiggling, someone's trying to make it sound like a Moog. This soundtrack to the documentary about Moog (rhymes with "vogue") features contemporary pieces about his instruments — mostly wordless, aside from Bootsy Collins's tribute to funk keyboardist Bernie Worrell, and mostly groovy, bubbly and underdeveloped, focusing on texture rather than tune. The lineup includes respected alt-rockers Tortoise and Stereolab, and a bonus disc includes historically important songs, from Emerson, Lake & Palmer's musty "Lucky Man" to Devo's "Mongoloid," and a They Might Be Giants cover of the Disneyland Electrical Parade theme "Baroque Hoedown."

DOUGLAS WOLK

DOWNLOAD THESE: Jean-Jacques Perry & Luke Vibert, "You Moog Me," The Moog Cookbook, "Bob's Funk"

VARIOUS ARTISTS

LIGHTNING IN A BOTTLE ****

COLUMBIA/LEGACY

Performed in the Rockettes' home,
blues to bring on good cheer

The point of blues music is not to express misery, but to confront and transcend it. Get it right and you can make everyone happy. Staged at New York City's Radio City Music Hall in 2003, the all-star "Salute to the Blues" show did just that. A benefit to aid impoverished blues musicians, the show was a raucous celebration of the genre's roots and fruits, whether expressed in African style by Angelique Kidjo or via white-boy rock & roll by Aerosmith's Steven Tyler and Joe Perry. The hip-hop nation is represented by Chuck D, traditional country by Alison Krauss and the straight-no-chaser blues by Buddy Guy and B.B. King. In all, a double-disc bundle of joy.

PAUL DU NOYER

DOWNLOAD THESE: Macy Gray, "Hound Dog," David Johansen & Hubert Sumlin, "Killing Floor," Natalie Cole, Mavis Staples & Ruth Brown, "Men Are Just Like Street Cars"

RICARDO VILLALOBOS

THÉ AU HAREM D'ARCHIMÈDE ****

PERLON

South American DJ delves
deep into the sonic jungle for
second studio album

Ricardo Villalobos's *Alcachofa* was 2003's most exquisitely detailed and endlessly listenable techno album. Now the Chilean-born DJ-producer returns with a record even more riddled with eerie intricacies. Paralleling his migration to Germany, Villalobos imports a languid, balmy sensuality to the dry Teutonic electronic style known as micro-house.

He irrigates the itchy rhythms with voluptuous percussion and humid atmospherics that seem to leave your skin stippled with condensation; to hear this album at its utmost, you need headphones. Standout track "Hello Halo" is like a malaria victim's fever-dream — oppressively vivid, a delirium of disassociated sensations. Not so much a dance record as it is a potent dose of fully modern psychedelia, *Harem D'Archimède* is all about eyelid movies.

SIMON REYNOLDS

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Hello Halo," "Miami"

VISQUEEN

SUNSET ON DATELAND ***

BLUEDISSUISE

Seattle trio mixes a veteran and a
novice for loud rock hijinks

Who says you can't live on Lucky Charms? Though Visqueen are three grownups, they play power pop like a bunch of bratty teenagers the night after they got their licenses. The trio has roots in the Fastbacks, one of the great bands to come out of Seattle, who lasted 20-plus years, before bassist-songwriter Kim Warrick left to form this new group. Shockeroo: Visqueen sound like a reinvigorated Fastbacks, even with newcomer singer-songwriter-guitarist Rachel Flotard fronting. A stomping, perspiring, jubilant bounce is all over their debut. Flotard adds a sweet, vulnerable voice — if you've ever wondered what Cheap Trick would sound like if they were fronted by Juliana Hatfield, this is your lucky day.

R.J. SMITH

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Blue," "Houston"

VANESSA WILLIAMS

SILVER & GOLD *

LAVA

Former Miss America puts coal in your
Christmas stocking

Rather than peace and goodwill to all men, Vanessa Williams's CD delivers the following yuletide message: "I intend to destroy America's Christmas with the potent →

I LOVE THIS CD!



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2, ASS ANGELS

JUDAS PRIEST SCREAMING FOR VENGEANCE

COLUMBIA

"This is fight music. Whenever I hear it, I want to kick somebody's ass. A lot of people could get hurt listening to this band."

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3. PROMOTIONAL PERIOD: Promotion begins 12:00:00 a.m. Eastern Time (ET) on 10/1/04 and ends 11:59:59 p.m. ET on 1/31/05 (the "Promotional Period"). A day begins 12:00:00 a.m. ET and ends 11:59:59 p.m. ET of that same day. Internet entries must be received and recorded by Sponsor's computer during Promotional Period. Sponsor's computer is the official clock for this Promotion. Promotion ends 11:59:59 p.m. ET on 1/31/05, or until supply of Plays with prizes is exhausted, whichever occurs first.

4. TO PLAY (Instant Win):

A) By Internet: Visit www.camelsmokes.com (the "Website") during the Promotional Period and click on Option I or, click on the link in the e-mail distributed by the Sponsor. A valid PID issued by Sponsor, a password and a valid e-mail address will be required to enter the Promotion by Internet. A PID can be obtained without cost from the Sponsor. Follow the online entry instructions for playing. When the required information is submitted as directed, entrant will be informed whether he/she has instantly won a prize (a "Play"). If you receive a message stating, "Congratulations, you've won," you win the prize stated (subject to verification). Non-winning messages will read, "Sorry, try again tomorrow."

B) By Mail: If you are an eligible smoker, 21 years of age or older with a photo ID, but do not have a PID, or wish to play by mail, you can participate by hand-printing on a plain piece of white paper your name, complete address, zip code, e-mail address (if applicable), daytime phone number, birthdate and the signed statement, "I certify that I am a smoker, that I am 21 years of age or older; and that I want to participate in The Speakeasy Is Still Roaring Instant Win. I agree to abide by the Official Rules. I understand that giving false information in order to participate in the Promotion may constitute a violation of law." Mail your completed, original submission in an envelope along with a true photocopy of your currently valid government-issued photo identification to: The Speakeasy Is Still Roaring Instant Win, P.O. Box 5568, Norwood, MN 55833-5568. All entries must be mailed separately via U.S. Postal Service first-class mail (no express, registered or certified mail accepted) for receipt beginning 10/1/04. All mail-in entries must be received by 2/7/05. Submissions without complete name, address, certification information (including entrant's signature) or proper identification are void and ineligible. Participants must pay postage when submitting a request for a Play. All submissions become the sole property of the Sponsor and will not be returned. When your mail-in submission is received, an independent judging organization will verify the completeness of your submission and determine if you have won a prize by playing on your behalf as soon after receipt as practical (while supply of Plays with prizes lasts). If you win a prize, you will be notified by mail, overnight mail and/or phone. Non-winning participants will not be contacted.

Limit one (1) Play per person/PID per day. There will be 1,200,000 Plays available during the Promotional Period. Winning Plays and the prizes associated with those Plays will be randomly allocated among the universe of Plays. Any attempt by any person to obtain more than the stated number of Plays/entries by using multiple/different e-mail accounts, PIDs, addresses or any other methods will void all of that person's Plays/entries and that person will be disqualified. Sponsor will not acknowledge receipt of or confirm eligibility or ineligibility of any entries. Incomplete submissions are ineligible. Plays/entries generated by a robotic, programmed, script, macro or other automated means will be disqualified. No copies, facsimiles or reproductions of mail-in entries accepted. By participating you will be added to, if you are not already on, Sponsor's distribution list(s). Entrant may opt-off the Sponsor's e-mail distribution list at any time by following a link in Sponsor-distributed e-mails. Entrant may opt-off the Sponsor's direct mail distribution list at any time (see Rule 10 below). Opting-off the distribution list(s) will not affect entrant's chance of winning. No other form of e-mail or Internet entry is valid. **The information you disclose when you register for this Promotion will be subject to the Privacy Policy set forth on Sponsor's Website.**

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SHOULD KNOW ABOUT



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**OGO-AT&T WIRELESS
CONCERT-HOPPER SWEEPSTAKES**

blending agent that is my voice." "Mary's Boy Child" is conceived as a kitsch bossa nova that will make you want to swipe all the cards off the mantelpiece. By "Drummer Boy" you'll be tearing down the tinsel and booting the turkey out the back door. The problem is: Mannered + Cloying doesn't = Christmassy. Unlike, say, Bruce Springsteen on his classic recording "Santa Claus Is Coming To Town," Williams has no vision of her own image. Don't fear the horrible sweater on Christmas morn. Fear unwrapping this, and with it the real possibility of brain stem death.

MICHAEL ODELL

DOWNLOAD THIS: None

WIRE

WIRE ON THE BOX: 1979

★★★★

PINKFLAG

England's artsiest '70s punks set their guitars on permafrost

Punk pioneers Wire were evolving so quickly in their first few years that this early 1979 German TV performance (a DVD of the same show is included in the package), including many of the songs they subsequently recorded for their third album 154, almost sounds like a different band. With Bruce Gilbert's whooshing noise guitar unable to reproduce their records' textural subtlety, the songs are odder and more skeletal, driven by the tension between their two singers: guitarist Colin Newman's barking, thrashing excitability and bassist Graham Lewis's slow-crawling menace. Despite the cold, murky sound quality, they sound charged-up and tough — "Another the Letter" and "Former Airline" are so fast and violent they could pass for hardcore.

DOUGLAS WOLK

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Another the Letter," "Map Ref. 41°N 93°W"

YING YANG TWINS

MY BROTHER & ME ☆☆

TVT

Atlanta's crunk jesters get low for hos and the boys who love them

With 2000's seven-dwarves inspired "Whistle While You Twurk," Ying Yang Twins seemed like a novelty act. Then they defied expectations: A succession of minor hits made them the ringleaders of Southern silliness, and last year, the Twins helped set off Lil Jon's gold-frontal crunk assault on America with "Get Low," a song that played like Simon Says after a half-dozen cognac and energy drink cocktails. On *My Brother & Me* (not to be confused with last year's *Me & My Brother* — take that, downloaders) Kaine and D-Roc continue to ride Lil Jon's dreadlocks, offering five remixes

Yung Wun, after jacking Ricardo Montalban's blazer.



(including two versions of "Saltshaker"), four songs fronted by others (maybe this should have been called *My Brother & Me & a Bunch of Our Friends*) and the horny "Halftime," where the word "crunk" is used no less than 50 times, lest anyone miss the point.

KRIS EX

DOWNLOAD THIS: "Halftime"

YUNG WUN

THE DIRTIEST THIRSTIEST

★★★★

J RECORDS

A rookie Atlanta MC with a death-metaler's love of noise

SHRIEKS,
BARKS &
GROWLS

What young Atlanta scrapper Yung Wun lacks in songwriting polish, he more than makes up for with his

raucous energy. His debut is a relentless assault of head-smacking, Swizz Beatz-assisted funk and an arsenal of shrieks, barks and growls: "Tear it Up" imagines the rowdiest halftime celebration of all time as Yung Wun and guests DMX, Lil' Flip and David Banner trade grunts over a swinging marching-band beat. On "Yung Wun Anthem," he screams autobiography over police sirens and synth horns, and even his moments of honest introspection ("Remember dreams as a kid? I don't sleep no mo'") he spits regretfully on "Starvin' & Robbin'" are punctuated by rabid shouts. The perfect soundtrack for those who fear quiet.

HUA HSU

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Tear it Up," "Yung Wun Anthem"

BLENDER APPROVED

The best new releases of the past few months



JAY-Z & R. KELLY
UNFINISHED BUSINESS

JIVE/ROC-A-FELLA/DEF JAM

Hip-hop's and R&B's heaviest hitters finish what they started on 2002's *Best of Both Worlds*. Like Shaq and Kobe, with better beats.



TED LEO/PHARMACISTS
SHAKE THE SHEETS

LOOKOUT!

A hook-happy punk with breakneck riffs recalls another New Jersey songwriter with a soft spot for the common man.



JIMMY EAT WORLD
FUTURES

INTERSCOPE

Maturing emo vets turn whining into fine wine on angst-ridden, melodically rich third album. Proof that grownups have feelings, too.



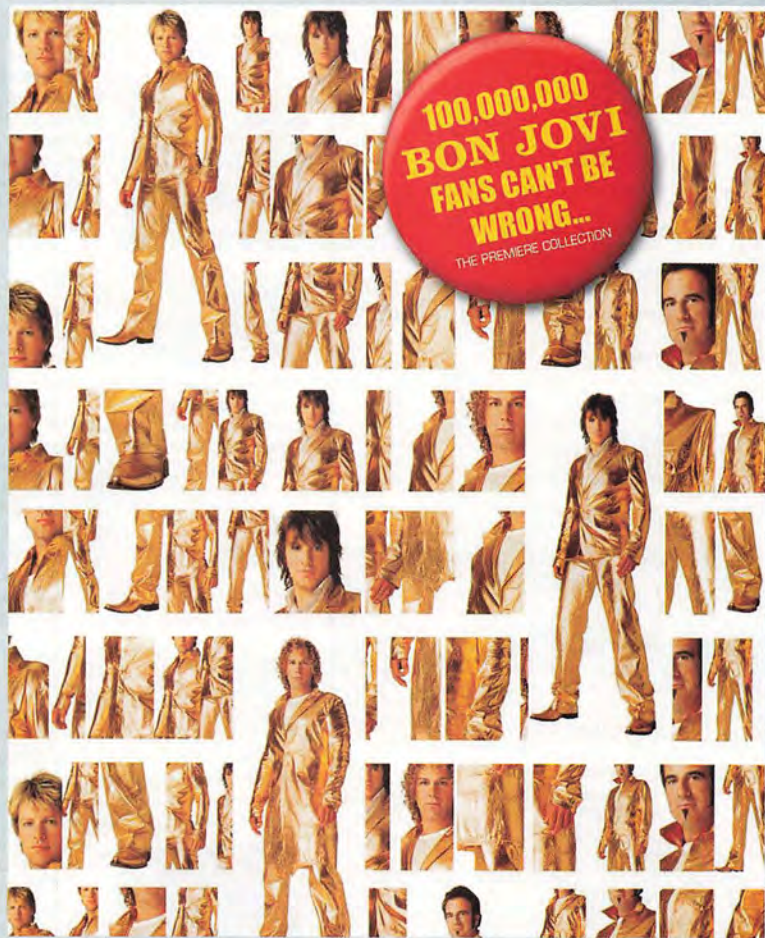
BRIAN WILSON
SMILE

NONESUCH

His voice is shot, he's 37 years overdue, and it's still a masterpiece. No wonder the Beatles were always scrambling to keep up.

GUEST LIST

COMPETITIONS, EVENTS AND OTHER FUN STUFF
WE THOUGHT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT



4 CDs + 1 DVD IN STORES NOW!

>> BON JOVI will celebrate a continued love affair with fans around the world on a mammoth five-disc, 50-song box set entitled *100,000,000 Bon Jovi Fans Can't Be Wrong...*, a premier collection composed almost entirely of unheard and unseen materials from the band's vast archive.

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★ **GIVE AND YOU SHALL RECEIVE!** On Thursday, December 2nd at 4 P.M., *Blender* will enhance your holiday shopping experience at CHAMPS SPORTS. While you shop for everyone on your list, you'll pick up a great gift for yourself from *Blender*: a CD sampler with any CHAMPS SPORTS purchase! Jam to tunes by a live DJ at CHAMPS SPORTS and get the latest in footwear and fashion from Nike, Reebok, Puma & Adidas.

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OCEAN'S TWELVE

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- T-shirt
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25 People have the chance to be winners!!

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THE

40

MOST POPULAR SONGS IN AMERICA

Bono and Beyoncé come close, but they can't top Slim Shady.



Kneel before my hot rhymes and fuzzy hands!

1

EMINEM**"JUST LOSE IT"**

ENCORE

BET pulled the plug on Em's controversial video — in which he dresses up as Michael Jackson and lies on a bed with little boys — after Jacko charged it was "disrespectful, inappropriate, insensitive and demeaning." Slim Shady will surely have an answer for him when he hits the road early next year.

HOW WE DID IT

The Most Popular Songs chart is based on radio and video airplay and album sales. Provided by HITSDailyDouble.com: "Proof that any idiot in the music business can have a Web site."



POSITION	TITLE	ARTIST	ALBUM/LABEL
1	"JUST LOSE IT"	EMINEM	ENCORE SHADY/INTERSCOPE
2	"LOSE MY BREATH"	DESTINY'S CHILD	DESTINY FULFILLED COLUMBIA
3	"VERTIGO"	U2	HOW TO DISMANTLE AN ATOMIC BOMB INTERSCOPE
4	"WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR"	GWEN STEFANI	LOVE ANGEL MUSIC BABY INTERSCOPE
5	"BIG CHIPS"	JAY-Z & R. KELLY	UNFINISHED BUSINESS JIVE/ROC-A-FELLA-DEF JAM
6	"DROP IT LIKE IT'S HOT"	SNOOP DOGG FEAT. PHARRELL	R&G (RHYTHM & GANGSTA): THE MASTER GEFEN
7	"MY PREROGATIVE"	BRITNEY SPEARS	GREATEST HITS: MY PREROGATIVE JIVE
8	"SHADOW"	ASHLEE SIMPSON	AUTOBIOGRAPHY GEFFEN
9	"OVER AND OVER"	NELLY FEAT. TIM MCGRAW	SUIT FOREVER/UNIVERSAL
10	"WELCOME TO MY LIFE"	SIMPLE PLAN	STILL NOT GETTING ANY ... LAVA
11	"BABY IT'S YOU"	JOJO	JOJO BLACKGROUND/UNIVERSAL
12	"DON'T LET ME DIE"	JAY-Z & R. KELLY	UNFINISHED BUSINESS JIVE/ROC-A-FELLA-DEF JAM
13	"MY BOO"	USHER FEAT. ALICIA KEYS	CONFESSIONS LAFACE
14	"FALL TO PIECES"	VELVET REVOLVER	CONTRABAND RCA
15	"MY HAPPY ENDING"	AVRIL LAVIGNE	UNDER MY SKIN ARISTA
16	"AMERICAN IDIOT"	GREEN DAY	AMERICAN IDIOT REPRISE
17	"GOODIES"	CIARA	GOODIES LAFACE
18	"RUMORS"	LINDSAY LOHAN	RUMORS CASABLANCA/UNIVERSAL
19	"BALLA BABY"	CHINGY	POWERBALLIN' DISTURBING THE PEACE/CAPITOL
20	"DISAPPEAR"	HOOBASTANK	THE REASON ISLAND
21	"SOMEBODY TOLD ME"	THE KILLERS	HOT FUSS ISLAND
22	"DAUGHTERS"	JOHN MAYER	HEAVIER THINGS AWARD/COLUMBIA
23	"SLOW HANDS"	INTERPOL	ANTICS MATADOR
24	"THOSE SWEET WORDS"	NORAH JONES	FEELS LIKE HOME BLUE NOTE
25	"SOMEWHERE ONLY WE KNOW"	KEANE	HOPES AND FEARS INTERSCOPE
26	"I DON'T WANT TO BE"	GAVIN DeGRAW	CHARIOT J RECORDS
27	"MR. BRIGHTSIDE"	THE KILLERS	HOT FUSS ISLAND
28	"TAKE IT AWAY"	THE USED	IN LOVE AND DEATH REPRISE
29	"LADY"	LENNY KRAVITZ	BAPTISM VIRGIN
30	"ONLY ONE"	YELLOWCARD	OCEAN AVENUE CAPITOL
31	"DARE YOU TO MOVE"	SWITCHFOOT	THE BEAUTIFUL LETDOWN COLUMBIA
32	"COLD"	CROSSFADE	CROSSFADE FIC/COLUMBIA
33	"BOULEVARD OF BROKEN DREAMS"	GREEN DAY	AMERICAN IDIOT REPRISE
34	"FALL BEHIND ME"	THE DONNAS	GOLD MEDAL ATLANTIC
35	"1985"	BOWLING FOR SOUP	A HANGOVER YOU DON'T DESERVE JIVE
36	"PREDICTABLE"	GOOD CHARLOTTE	THE CHRONICLES OF LIFE AND DEATH EPIC
37	"BLOOD RED SUMMER"	COHEED & CAMBRIA	IN KEEPING SECRETS EQUAL VISION/COLUMBIA
38	"YOU HAD ME"	JOSS STONE	MIND BODY & SOUL S-CURVE
39	"HOME"	THREE DAYS GRACE	THREE DAYS GRACE JIVE
40	"USED TO LOVE U"	JOHN LEGEND	GET LIFTED SONY URBAN/COLUMBIA

16

GREEN DAY**"AMERICAN IDIOT"**

AMERICAN IDIOT

This punk roar-power ballad helped Green Day's rock opera debut at the top of the



charts. Fresh off an appearance on *The Jimmy Kimmel Show* and a tour with New Found Glory, they'll head to Europe in January for a month of gigs.

18

LINDSAY LOHAN**"RUMORS"**

RUMORS

Everyone's favorite mean girl makes forays into the pop charts with this anti-hater anthem. Her debut drops next month; in the meantime, look for her on the set of *Herbie: Fully Loaded*, a *Love Bug* remake that will be racing to a theater near you next year.



34

THE DONNAS**"FALL BEHIND ME"**

GOLD MEDAL

The San Francisco punkettes are lighting up MTV2's request line with this searing lead single. Their U.S. tour with the Von Bondies is winding down soon, but fans in



the Southern Hemisphere can see them roaming the outback at Australia's Big Day Out festival all next month.

THE 10 MOST POPULAR RING TONES IN AMERICA

The presence of Lil Jon and Vanilla Ice on the same chart begs one question: *Whaat?*

1	"ON FIRE"	LLOYD BANKS
2	"MY BOO"	USHER FEAT. ALICIA KEYS
3	"LEAN BACK"	TERROR SQUAD
4	"GOODIES"	CIARA
5	"LOCKED UP"	AKON
6	"GET LOW"	LIL JON & THE EAST SIDE BOYZ
7	"MY PLACE"	NELLY
8	"ICE ICE BABY"	VANILLA ICE
9	"SOUTHSIDE"	LLOYD BANKS
10	"MOVE, BITCH"	LUDACRIS FEAT. MYSTIKAL

SOURCE: VIRGIN MOBILE

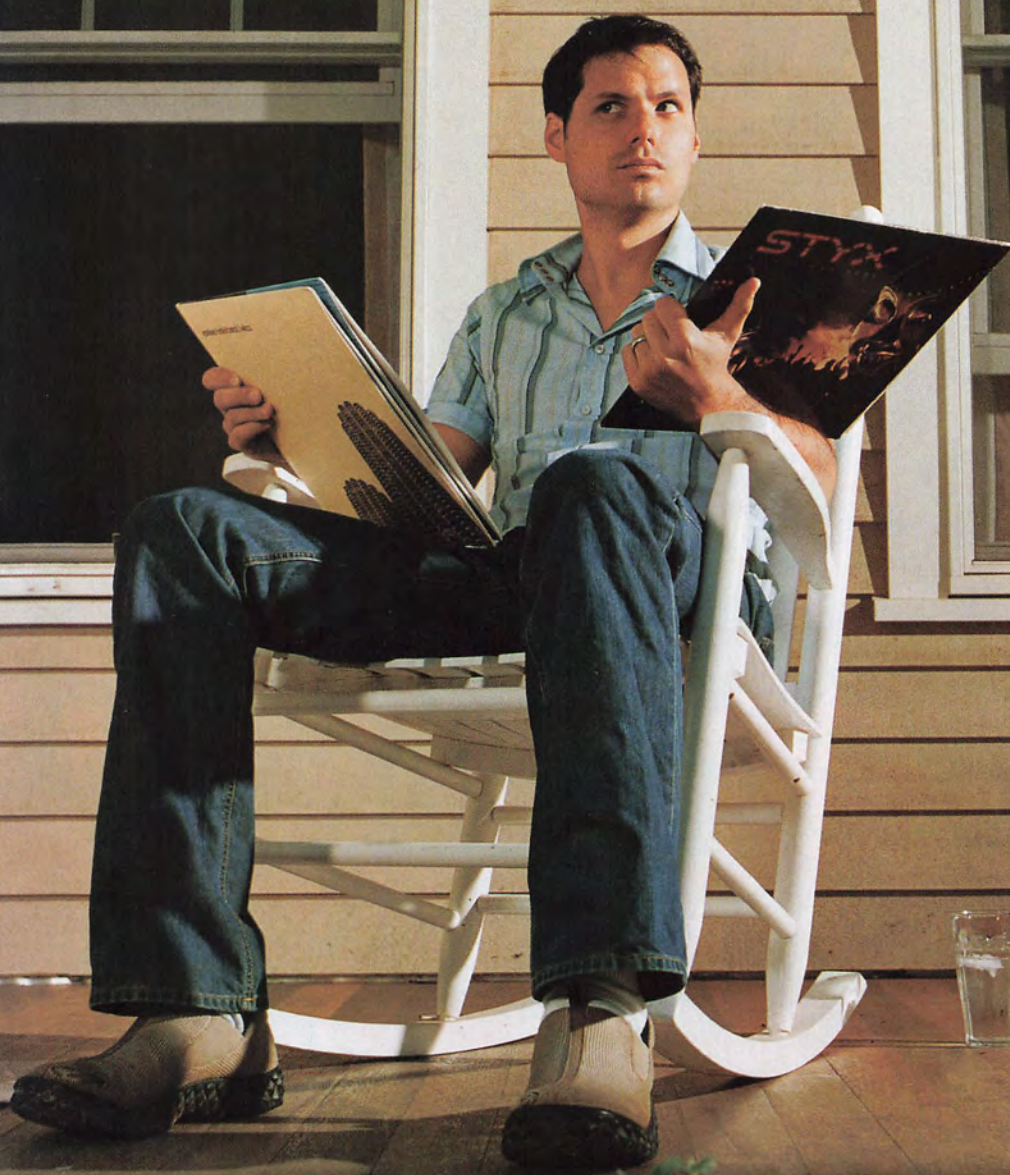


Free Friday & Saturday night calls require purchase and online activation of Slider V5, Flasher V7 and Vox 8610 Handsets between 10/24/04 and 12/31/04. Excludes international calls. Some restrictions apply. Visit virginmobileusa.com for full details.

"I Never Became Cool"

Sure, comedian-actor **Michael Ian Black** listens to Hüsker Dü, Fugazi and Dylan. But it's that Styx album he'll never live down.

BY PAULINE O'CONNOR
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL LEWIS



THE CD THAT MADE ME, LIKE, THINK



STYX
KILROY WAS HERE
A&M

"This was the first album I put on by choice and listened to over and over on a nightly basis. I was 10 or 11. I knew it was a story, but I wasn't sure what it was about. I thought it was like a 1984 thing. I took 'Mr. Roboto' very seriously. The first 30 years of my life were all about questioning authority. My musical journey comes down to anti-authority and 'Fuck the police.'"

THE CD THAT MAKES ME FEEL LIKE AN OLD FART



FRUIT BATS
MOUTHFULS
SUB POP

"I downloaded this from iTunes — I think it was on some celebrity asshole's playlist. There are certain band names — 'Fruit Bats' is one — you might as well just take a lasso and throw it around me. The music is mellow; it's emblematic of the kind of thing I'm looking for now. I don't need anti-authority anymore. Leave punk rock to the next generation. I don't need the *agita*."

THE CD THAT MADE ME WANNA BLOW SHIT UP



PUBLIC ENEMY
IT TAKES A NATION OF MILLIONS TO HOLD US BACK
DEF JAM

"This is more of that anti-authority thing. When I was young, I was like a Columbine kid. I used to mentally try to make my grade school blow up by starting really hard at a particular cinderblock. But I would never actually *do* anything, unlike Chuck D. Hearing this, it was like Chuck D grabbed me by the shoulders and said, 'Forget armies; it's going to take an entire nation.'"

THE CD THAT I SHOPLIFTED IN COLLEGE



N.W.A
STRAIGHT OUTTA COMPTON
PRIORITY

"The summer before my junior year of college, I went through a period of stealing CDs from Tower. I was living on the Lower East Side, delivering pizzas, and this was my 'disfranchised-white-guy' soundtrack. I thought they were scary guys: If I ran into them in a dark alley, best-case scenario would have me ending up in a coma. Though I had a little man-crush on Eazy-E."

THE CD FOR WALLOWING IN DEPRESSION



BOB DYLAN
BLOOD ON THE TRACKS
COLUMBIA

"This has my favorite song of all time, 'Buckets of Rain.' It's such a good song that I don't listen to it because I think if I listen to it, I'll get tired of it. It seems to be the loneliest song I've ever heard. I find Dylan annoying, didactic, obtuse, yet I love him to death, because I'm manic-depressive, self-doubting, self-loathing, angst-ridden, didactic and obtuse. I'll compare myself to Dylan in any way I can."

THE CD THAT MADE ME SMARTER



RADIOHEAD
OK COMPUTER
CAPITOL

"This had the same effect on me as the Beatles had on an earlier generation; it opened my head to what music could be. It took me to the limits of my intelligence, maybe even raised my IQ a few points. If you had an infinite number of me's with an infinite number of typewriters, we could never come up with it. It reminds me of all the ways I'm a moron. They're saying, 'You don't need to be a genius, we got it covered.'"

THE CD THAT INSPIRED WEIRD SEX FANTASIES



SINÉAD O'CONNOR
I DO NOT WANT WHAT I HAVEN'T GOT
CHRYSALIS

"This is quietly furious — I like when you can be pissed off and quiet and orchestral about it. The bald thing was a big turn-on. I saw her on the street once and thought, 'Man, I'd like to tap that ass.' We could do the one-nighter — that would be tremendous. Then she'd call me a motherfucker and throw me out and that would be the end of it."

THE CD I USE TO AVOID MY KIDS



WILCO
YANKEE HOTEL FOXTROT
NONESUCH

"I listen to music when I write to drown out the sounds of my children screaming. I have a 1-year-old daughter and 3-year-old son. Someone else's solution might be to find out why they're crying and comfort them, but I'd rather not get up. So I just put on my headphones and crank up the Wilco. I need something soft and dreamy — 'just simmer down' music."

THE CD TO PUT GOOD CHARLOTTE IN ITS PLACE



FUGAZI
13 SONGS
DISCHORD

"I think this is the best rock album ever. You can keep your Good Charlottes and your Cali-pop — Fugazi did it better. I used to go out to Maxwell's in New Jersey or CBGB's to see these guys whenever they came to town. I loved their attitude: 'We're just doing our own thing, you can come or not, we're going to do it regardless. We charge five bucks, and there's no merch — merch is beneath us.'"

THE CD I HOPED WOULD MAKE ME COOL



HÜSKER DÜ
CANDY APPLE GREY
WARNER BROS.

"When I was 14, I thought if I had a large cassette collection, that would make me cool. So I bought this cassette. It was the worst thing I'd ever heard — I was used to stuff like the Cars — but I kept listening to it because I hated it so much and eventually it grew on me. But I never became cool, unfortunately."

→ Michael Ian Black appears in IFC's *The Baxter* and *Stella* on Comedy Central.

AND MORE...

FIONA APPLE WHEN THE PAWN... ARAB STRAP MONDAY AT THE HUG & PINT THE BEASTIE BOYS TO THE 5 BOROUGHS BECK SEA CHANGE DAVID BOWIE CHANGES BOWIE HAROLD BUDD THE ROOM LEONARD COHEN MORE BEST OF LEONARD COHEN JOE COCKER SUPER HITS RY COODER MUSIC BY RY COODER THE CURE STARRING AT THE SEA: THE SINGLES MILES DAVIS KIND OF BLUE NEIL DIAMOND HIS 12 GREATEST HITS EMINEM THE MARSHALL MATHERS LP BRIAN ENO & HAROLD BUDD AMBIENT 2: THE PLATEAUX OF MIRROR JAMES & BRIAN ENO WAH WAH EVERYTHING BUT THE GIRL IDLEWILD ALI FARKA TOURE WITH RY COODER TALKING TIMBUKTU THE FLAMING LIPS THE SOFT BULLETTIN MARVIN GAYE WHAT'S GOING ON AL GREEN GREATEST HITS GUIDED BY VOICES EARTHQUAKE GLUE TED HAWKINS THE NEXT HUNDRED YEARS INTERPOL TURN ON THE BRIGHT LIGHTS IRON & WINE THE SEA & THE RHYTHM ETNA JAMES THE SWEETEST PEACHES: THE CHESS YEARS NORAH JONES COME AWAY WITH ME K.D. LANG INVINCIBLE SUMMER SHELBY LYNNIE IDENTITY CRISIS MODEST MOUSE BUILDING NOTHING OUT OF SOMETHING MODEST MOUSE THE LONESOME CROWDED WEST MCGWAI COME ON DIE YOUNG NATURAL CALAMITY PEACH HEAD WILLIE NELSON & JOHNNY CASH VH1 STORYTELLERS NEUTRAL MILK HOTEL IN THE AEROPANE OVER THE SEA BETH ORTON TRAILER PARK RADIOHEAD HAIL TO THE THIEF ROLLING STONES BEGGARS BANQUET ROLLING STONES LET IT BLEED PETER DALETT AFTER A WHILE SAM & DAVE THE BEST OF... THE SHINS CHUTES TOO NARROW SIMON AND GARFUNKEL COLLECTED WORKS SNOW PATROL FINAL STRAW SON VOLT TRACE CAT STEVENS MONA BONE JAKON CAT STEVENS TEA FOR THE TILLERMAN THE STROKES IS THIS IT? TINDERSTICKS WAITING FOR THE MOON THE UNICORNS WHO WILL CUT OUR HAIR WHEN WE'RE GONE? VARIOUS ARTISTS THE BEST OF BLAXPLOITATION VARIOUS ARTISTS KCRW RARE ON AIR, VOL. 2 VERBENA LA MUSICA NEGRA RUFUS WAINWRIGHT WAITING FOR A WANT RUFUS WAINWRIGHT WANT ONE TOM WAITS RAIN DOGS WILCO A GHOST IS BORN LUCINDA WILLIAMS WORLD WITHOUT TEARS YELLOWCARD OCEAN AVENUE THOM YORKE THE BRIDGE SCHOOL CONCERT NEIL YOUNG AFTER THE GOLDRUSH NEIL YOUNG HARVEST

Magically, Britney's dreams of pop success, Vegas weddings and quickie annulments would all come true.



Not Yet

Why Britney Spears's greatest moment came when she was only 16

a Woman

BRITNEY SPEARS
GREATEST HITS: MY PREROGATIVE

JIVE

HAS A MAJOR pop icon ever had less influence on music than Britney Spears? As a shaper of spectacle, her retread Lolita act has spread across the country — *Nightline* reporters seem to be obsessed with her — though Spears freely admits to inheriting the flash from her aging Mama Madonna. Spears's name has become synonymous with a phenomenon that both titillates and disturbs Americans: the sexualization of young girls. As a brand, she's at least as successful as Sierra Mist.

But music has always been secondary to her career, and that's increasingly true as tabloid headlines pile up and obscure her mastery of videos and concert extravaganzas. The hits collected on *My Prerogative* are as sticky as soda and almost as easy to rinse out. Spears will go down in history books, but not for anything she's created, besides a world-class stir.

Three new songs illustrate the limits of her imagination: the ill-spirited title track, a remake which invokes drug-rehabbed '80s R&B star Bobby Brown as an unlikely role model; the instantly forgettable and biographically inaccurate "I've Just Begun (Having My Fun)"; and "Do Somethin'," a decent bit of crunk where she raps in a cutesy-poo drawl that suggests she could have nabbed the *Dukes of Hazzard* sexpot role from Jessica Simpson. Britney can squeal, as Kevin Federline surely will confirm soon in an exclusive *People* magazine interview.

Except for one, the other 14 songs are like familiar dreams: A few snippets tickle the ear's memory, but the meanings of these perfectly enjoyable songs have gotten lost. Listen for groove and mood and you can have fun playing the reference game.

"Oops! . . . I Did It Again" is the sound of Swedish producers resurrecting their countrymen ABBA. "I'm A Slave 4 U" is the Prince tribute that the Neptunes could never have given to a black singer because

of the loaded title. "Sometimes," her sweetest ballad, is like 'N Sync made for girls to sing.

"Overprotected" offers the kind of sexual self-assertion that her rival Christina Aguilera has made a hallmark, while "Outrageous" is R. Kelly's dirty little take on the ideal Janet Jackson song. Spears's hits are like a virtual reality game, with the singer as the ultimate Sim. In the era of celebrity saturation, she has adapted by matching her competition at their own games.

Only one indelible moment remains: The song that defines her legacy. From its first measures, in which Beethoven-esque piano meets a murmured girl-Elvis imitation, ". . . Baby One More Time"

announces itself as significant. The rest follows through: the chorus's anthemic build, the creeping bassline buried in the mix and, especially, the overwrought, sexy, confused and totally believable vocals.

This is the sound of a 16-year-old girl playing out the hand dealt to her by a culture that both fears and worships youthful female sexuality. Far from being a victim, she sings like a boxer aiming to place her next punch: tough, wily, channeling her anger as a way of keeping herself in the ring. When she snaps "Hit me, baby," she's not asking for abuse but for an equal partner in the free-for-all that she views love (or sex) to be.

The song made Spears a metaphor for a whole series of frightening changes that are now besetting girls everywhere, from the onset of puberty in 11-year-olds to the anti-sensual terror wrought by abstinence-only education. And it wasn't just the video, or the schoolgirl costume, that did it. ". . . Baby One More Time" does what only great pop songs can do: In less than five minutes, it contains an emotional storm that is both widely public and deeply personal. If only she had continued to prove worthy of that heroic task. ANN POWERS

DOWNLOAD THESE: ". . . Baby One More Time," "Oops! . . . I Did It Again," "I'm a Slave 4 U"

THE SCORE >>

★★★★★

EXCELLENT. A MUST-HAVE

★★★★

GREAT. CHECK IT OUT

★★★

GOOD

★★

JUST OK

★

WEAK

VASHTI BUNYAN

JUST ANOTHER DIAMOND DAY ★★★

DICRISTINA STAIR BUILDERS

Friendly animals and trees abound in a long-lost folk-hippy ramble

The back-to-nature impulse of '60s hippies led to a folk-music revival in Britain and a predilection for records as delicate as this one. English art student Vashti Bunyan was an outstandingly pretty singer whom

the Rolling Stones' manager Andrew Loog Oldham hoped to make famous. But her career yielded only this 1970 album, made with Nick Drake's producer, Joe Boyd, and showing a less intense brand of the same acoustic dreaminess. The whispered frailty of Bunyan's voice and childlike innocence of her lyrics made this record a cult obsession that commercial doom only deepened. Discouraged, she returned to a quiet life in the countryside. But acclaim by a new generation (including singer Devendra Banhart, on whose recent album Bunyan appears) has prompted plans for a comeback.

PAUL DU NOYER

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Diamond Day," "Window Over the Bay"

THE COUP

PARTY MUSIC ★★★★★

EPITAPH

Oakland rap revolutionaries blow up big ideas on reissue

The Coup gained notoriety three years ago when the cover art for their fourth album, depicting the World Trade Center exploding, eerily anticipated the attacks of 9/11.



The Coup take a break from sticking it to The Man.

Newly reissued (with a comparatively benign Molotov cocktail replacing the original artwork), their politicized rants are more relevant than ever. On "Ride the Fence," leader Boots Riley wryly observes, "The whole world's anti-United Snakes." Fortunately, the group complements their polemics with a variety of funk flavors. "Everythang," a call to arms, is set to a sizzling new wave-disco bounce; "Get Up," featuring the like-minded rappers dead prez, raises a clenched fist amidst haunting

chimes. And on the soulful acoustic number "Wear Clean Draws," Riley tenderly toasts his daughter as a future soldier in the struggle, personalizing revolutionary talk as few lyricists can. A true coup.

CHAIRMAN MAO

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Ghetto Manifesto," "Lazymuthafucka," "Get Up"

DEPECHE MODE

REMIXES 81-04 ★★★★★

REPRISE

British synth titans go under the surgeon's knife

Danny Tenaglia calls his pulsing refit of "I Feel Loved" the "Labor of Love Dub," demonstrating why the likes of Air, DJ Shadow and William Orbit return Depeche Mode's calls: respect. Completists may lament certain omissions, but these two discs (three in the limited edition) accurately reflect the band's tireless potential for reinvention. Approaching from radically different angles, Austria's Kruder and Dorfmeister envelop "Useless" in a dreamy miasma, Underworld clad "Barrel of a Gun" in glinting techno framework and Depeche Mode themselves immerse "Shout" in cavernous →

Warts and all

On career-spanning box set, the King of Pop grows up, freaks out

MICHAEL JACKSON

THE ULTIMATE COLLECTION

★★★

EPIC/LEGACY

THIS WELL-SELECTED phantasmagoria of hits, alternate takes, unreleased songs, demos and remixes traces an arc not just of promise fulfilled and outlived, but of something close to tragedy: A phenomenally ebullient child star tops himself like none before, only to transmute into a lost weirdo.

Until his fourth solo album as an adult, *Dangerous*, Jackson's immense originality, adaptability and ambition generate genius beats, hooks, arrangements and vocals (though not lyrics). This is no less true of 1970's "ABC" than of 1979's "Don't Stop 'Til You Get Enough" or 1991's "Black or White." While inventing sounds never heard before, he changes with the times, from Top 40 to disco, funk to new-jack swing.

But as his troubling life gets away from him in the '90s, so does his music. The fourth disc

wisely downplays his intermittent belief that the next step in his progress was Céline Dion, and two tracks from 2001's underrated *Invincible* prove he hasn't lost his sense of rhythm. But theme statements like R. Kelly's endless "You Are Not Alone" and *Free Willy* 2's regrettable "Childhood" are quietly yucky, and the four new songs are bland, forced or both. The big finale opposes war.

The DVD, a 1992 concert, is of course *de trop* (though check the fluid "Thriller"—"Billie Jean" set), and one must ask why, oh Lord, the mawkish 1972 hit "Ben" rather than the sprightly "Rockin' Robin." But the classics are perfectly picked, and most of the bait cuts are engaging, with standouts like the loose "Shake a Body" and the ape-aided "Monkey Business" much more. Still, most of us will access Jackson's history in its full original glory playing *Thriller*, *Off the Wall*, *Dangerous* and *Bad* when we want to remember.

ROBERT CHRISTGAU

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Shake a Body," "Don't Stop 'Til You Get Enough"

Michael Jackson and Kermit the Frog bond over their love of kids.



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industrial dub. The caliber of the new names invited to ransack the back catalogue, from Goldfrapp to Linkin Park's Mike Shinoda, confirms DM's enduring allure.

DORIAN LYNSEY

DOWNLOAD THESE: Kruder and Dorfmeister, "Useless," Goldfrapp, "Halo (Remix)"

THE GO-BETWEENS

LIBERTY BELLE AND THE BLACK DIAMOND EXPRESS ★★★★★

TALLULAH ★★★★★

16 LOVERS LANE ★★★★★

JETSET

Strummy, literary Aussie romantics at their confused, lovelorn best

The Go-Betweens can fit more emotions into a song than most bands get through in entire careers. Complexity is second nature to the Australian folk-pop romantics, whose memorable musings on love and loss are at once funny, empathetic and touchingly tentative. These reissues — albums four through six, each with a bonus disc of rarities and outtakes — revisit a productive late-'80s stretch. (They disbanded soon after, but frontmen Robert Forster and Grant McLennan got back together in 1999.) By turns moody and breezy, *Liberty Belle* (1986) proves their mastery of the subliminal hook; *16 Lovers Lane* (1988), meanwhile, is crammed with slick, straightforward choruses. In between, they made their greatest album, *Tallulah* (1987), an epic full of melodic intricacies and hairpin turns from wisecrass to wise, with an aura of elusiveness that explains this subtle band's staying power. These songs give up their secrets gradually, and only get better with age.

DENNIS LIM

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Spring Rain," "Right Here," "The House Jack Kerouac Built," "Streets of Your Town"

EDDIE HAZEL

GAME, DAMES AND GUITAR THANGS ★★★★★

RHINO HANDMADE

Solo album from 1977 by a pioneering rock wizard

A sometimes-forgotten linchpin of black rock, Eddie Hazel bridged the gap between Jimi Hendrix's blues experiments and the Afro-metal antics of the Bad Brains and Vernon Reid. Hazel was the original lead guitarist of the spacey experimental band Funkadelic, and his solo on 1971's "Maggot Brain" is an acid rock landmark of fuzzbox dancing. Drugs and crime left "Smeero" (his band nickname) adrift, with brilliant flashes mixed among musical inactivity before his death in 1992. This

Depeche Mode:
"No, I'll be
Crockett and
you be Tubbs."



album, augmented by four obscure studio jams, hints at his unharvested talent. On the instrumental "What About It," he trades lead and rhythm parts exquisitely with Mike Hampton, who succeeded him as Funkadelic's guitar god. Of the rare material, "Lampoc Boogie," with Hendrix drummer Buddy Miles, is a sweet, bluesy ride with a swinging tempo and soaring solos.

NELSON GEORGE

DOWNLOAD THESE: "I Want You (She's So Heavy)," "What About It," "Lampoc Boogie"

MATTHEW JAY

... TOO SOON ★★★★★

JAYS MUSIC

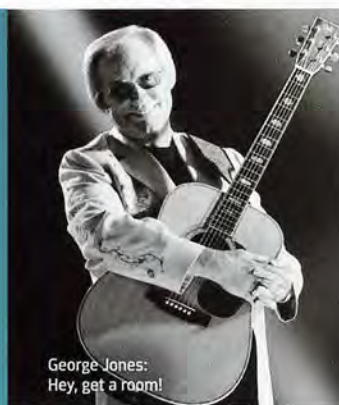
Round-up of hard-to-find material from late British folkie

After releasing one CD of self-described "psychedelic folk," 2001's *Draw*, Welsh songwriter Matthew Jay

was dropped by his U.K. record label despite strong reviews, and, in 2003, at age 24, he fell to his death from a seventh-floor window. While the cause of his death remains unresolved, Jay's parents — who are releasing this collection of rarities and early recordings under their Jays Music imprint — are adamant their son did not commit suicide. And that hopeful belief is somewhat reinforced by the jauntiness of much of the material here, from the rolling accordion-punctuated folk of "Sunday" to the stripped-back waltz of "Roadside." Throughout it all, Matthew Jay's songwriting and his light but authoritative vocals make a strong argument for the notion that the loss is not just felt by his nearest and dearest. (Available online at Matthewjay.com)

CLARK COLLIS

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Louie," "Sunday"



George Jones:
Hey, get a room!

GEORGE JONES

50 YEARS OF HITS ★★★★★

BANDIT

Fifty hits, one per year, for a Texas-born titan of country

THE
KING OF
COUNTRY

With his edgy timbre, daunting technique and emotional intensity, George Jones is the most commanding singer in country music history. With Frank Sinatra and Ray Charles gone, he's the most commanding popular singer alive. And by one measure, he's also the most successful: Nobody in any genre has had as many chart singles. *George Jones: 50 Years of Hits* chooses one a year, beginning with the 1955 "Why Baby Why," and makes a strong case for Jones's mastery. The three CDs play down the few obligatory novelty-ties (the 1959 "White Lightning") in favor of such transcendent dirges as "He Stopped Loving Her Today" (1980). Bonus points for including the unappreciated "A Few Old Country Boys" (1990), a duet in which he sings rings around the formidable Randy Travis. Of all the Jones best-ofs, this is the keeper.

DAVID GATES

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Color of the Blues," "Good Year for the Roses," "Cold Hard Truth"

JOBRIATH

LONELY PLANET BOY ★★★★★

ATTACK/SANCTUARY

Tragically fabulous '70s glam casualty turns out to be just tragic

An early example of catastrophic hype, Jobriath was a Hair cast member hastily rebranded for early-'70s glitter-rock. Elektra Records made extravagant claims that they had found the new Bowie. But while the former Bruce Wayne Campbell had such attributes as homosexuality, a cockney whine — "I'm an elegant *ma-yun!*" — and mock-operatic arrangements, he was only a K-Mart Ziggy. His death from AIDS in 1983 ensured that Jobriath became a romantic touchstone to the likes →

BURIED TREASURE

UNEARTHING LOST CLASSICS

MARVIN GAYE

HERE, MY DEAR ★★★★★

MOTOWN, 1978



Marvin Gaye:
"That's 'Gaye' with an 'E.'"

When Marvin Gaye's divorce settlement stipulated he pay the royalties from his next album to his ex-wife, he responded with this marriage post-mortem, a milestone in exhibitionism and revenge. Today, songs like "Anger" retain the voyeuristic appeal of a good *Jerry Springer* show, but it's the album's lush sound — Gaye's vocals drifting over voluptuous funk grooves — that make it a classic, the template for a generation of neosoul wannabes. JODY ROSEN

DOWNLOAD THESE: "When Did You Stop Loving Me . . .," "Anna's Song," "You Can Leave, But It's Going to Cost You"





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Pavement:
"No, you can't
take a dump
in the sink."



Slack Pack

The snarky, defensive peak of '90s indie rock

PAVEMENT

CROOKED RAIN, CROOKED RAIN: L.A.'S DESERT ORIGINS ★★★★★

MATADOR

WHEN "CUT YOUR Hair," the acerbic, whooping centerpiece of Pavement's second album, nuzzled the Top 100's nether regions in 1994, a tremor went through the rock underground. *Slanted and Enchanted*, the band's debut, had been a sub-cultural shibboleth for the irony generation, but this hit wasn't a Nirvana-style mass-culture breakout — just an unusual instance of the contentious network of college radio, clubs and stores agreeing on their feverish auto-critical wordplay and cat's-cradle racket of hooks. The band became the standard-bearers for indie-rock as an economic and musical phenomenon. Naturally, Pavement's auteur, Stephen Malkmus, was more bothered than flattered by the acclaim.

Crooked Rain, Crooked Rain's lyrics keep circling back to Malkmus's deep uneasiness about the intersection of music and commerce. In "Cut Your Hair," he sings about "attention and fame," but slurs and rhymes it to be heard as "ten-

sion and fear," and "Range Life" is a relaxed country-rock sing-along about the futility of country-rock. Still, Malkmus sounds half-drunk on his own chutzpah as a singer, and when he and fellow guitarist Spiral Stairs lock into one of their bumpy grooves, they swagger — the sky-scraping riff of "Elevate Me Later" seems simple until you realize how many clever, cross-talking parts it involves.

This reissue bulks up the original to two CDs with the outtakes, B-sides and radio sessions that poured out of them in those days. They're not of the album's caliber — not much is — but they offer fascinating insight: Pavement's debt to R.E.M. (a cover of their "Camera" and the ridiculous "Unseen Power of the Picket Fence," a song about the R.E.M. discography); Malkmus's tendency to work out his riffs long before his lyrics; and the fact that by the time *Crooked Rain* was released, they'd already recorded versions of many of its key songs on *Wowee Zowee*. They were at the peak of their creativity, and their songs meant a lot, whether they liked it or not.

DOUGLAS WOLK

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Cut Your Hair," "Stop Breathin'," "Range Life"

of Morrissey, who compiled this album, but *Lonely Planet Boy* just disinters a lot of fifth-hand Bowieisms so trite they resemble an unfunny parody of the polysexual '70s. Clanging harpsichords, strangled Jagger vocals, musical-theatre piano pieces, "earthlings" and "space clowns" — it's all here, and none of it works.

ANDREW HARRISON

DOWNLOAD THIS: None

JUVENILE

GREATEST HITS ★★★

CASH MONEY/ UNIVERSAL

Before "Slow Motion," this man was a super-speed, ass-jiggling dynamo

When the Dirty South twurked its way onto pop radars in the late '90s, it sounded like an alien invasion, and none of its icons were as jarring as Juvenile. His voice was a sloppy casserole of groans and slurred syllables, and stunning for that reason. With "Ha," the lead single from 1998's four-million-selling *400 Degreez*, he boldly chopped rhyming, rhythm and intelligibility from the list of necessary elements for a rap hit. Equally radical was Cash Money house producer Mannie Fresh, mastermind of cheap electro intensity ("U Understand," "Lil' Boyz"). But this set proves what the leering breakthrough "Back that Azz Up" suggested: Juvenile makes a fire hydrant seem witty, and his appeal is purely sonic.

JONAH WEINER

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Ha," "Juvenile On Fire," "U Understand"

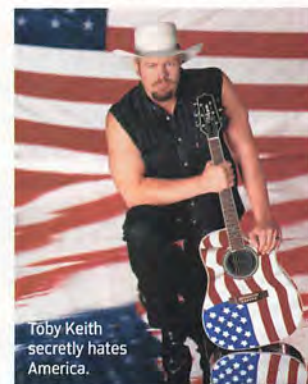
TOBY KEITH

GREATEST HITS 2 ★★

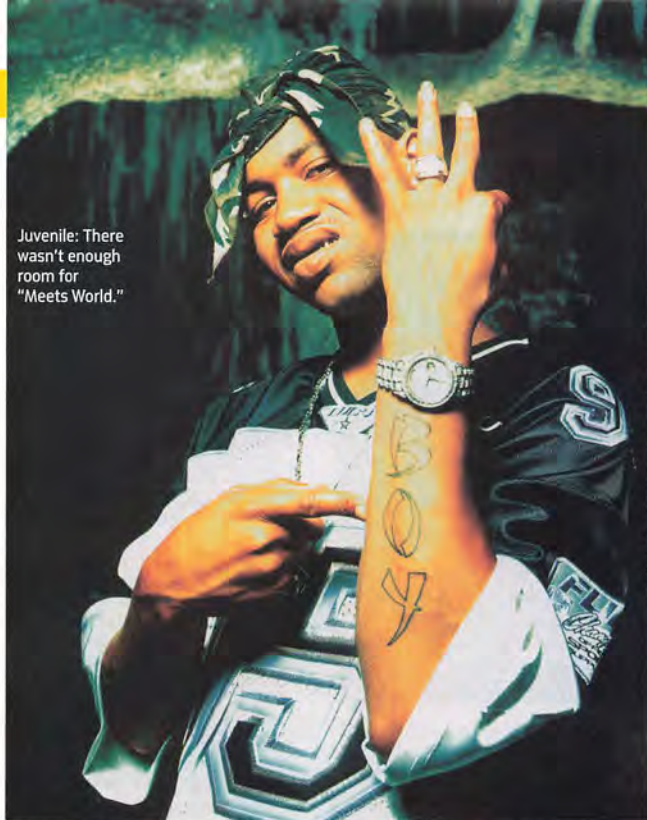
DREAMWORKS NASHVILLE

Nashville's right-wing roughneck stays on message

Toby Keith has a vocal style of loud exhortation, not cool country singing. Unlike Hank Williams Jr., his brainier, more aching '70s precursor, Keith likes aggressive jingles. Exhibit A: "Courtesy of the Red, White and Blue," his revenge-obsessed 9/11 tune. In "How Do You Like Me Now?!"



Toby Keith secretly hates America.



Juvenile: There wasn't enough room for "Meets World."

he addresses a woman who rejected him long ago; now he sort of stalks her, as he gleefully says, by coming out of her radio. His best tune is "Who's Your Daddy," where he plays human Gold Card to a girl. The compilation includes a few new songs: One utilizes the suggestive expression that what happens in Mexico "Stays In Mexico"; another, sung with his daughter, is a version of the old R&B tune "Mockingbird" that substitutes all the lovely Martha's Vineyard pop of the '70s James Taylor-Carly Simon hit with bluster, Keith's default sensibility.

JAMES HUNTER

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Who's Your Daddy," "I Wanna Talk About Me," "How Do You like Me Now?!"

JOHN LENNON

ROCK'N'ROLL ★★

ACOUSTIC ★★

CAPITOL

Being dead never stopped anyone putting out albums. Ask Tupac.

Rock'N'Roll was Beatle John's 1975 collection of nostalgic, late-'50s rock covers, undertaken in part to settle a legal case with a mobbed-up music publisher who claimed that the Beatles song "Come Together" plagiarized Chuck Berry's "You Can't Catch Me." (It did.) Early sessions featured producer Phil Spector shooting his gun while Lennon downed cognac and, perhaps understandably, the sax-bloated results lack urgency. The same cannot be said for *Acoustic*, an edit of barebones tracks from 1998's four-CD Lennon anthology lent novelty value by seven unreleased performances. Of these, "God" and "Well Well Well" are exceptional — like the ghostly demos of a '20s bluesman — while "Real Love" sounds even more like

an Oasis B-side than it did when resurrected by the surviving Beatles as a single in 1996. A stark, emotional collection, but the bottom of the Lennon barrel, surely?

TONY POWER

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Stand By Me," "You Can't Catch Me" (Rock'N'Roll); "God," "Well Well Well," "Working Class Hero" (Acoustic)

MEKONS

HEAVEN AND HELL: THE VERY BEST OF THE MEKONS ★★

COOKING VINYL

Schizoid overview of the art-punk collective's first quarter-century

A two-disc survey of the Mekons' 27-year career sounds like a great idea, but this oddly selected, bizarrely sequenced set does few favors for the indefatigable British punk intellectuals. It leapfrogs randomly around their rockabilly, dub, synth-pop and mope-rock periods, among others, omits some of their best-loved songs, includes too many quavery dirges, which don't make much sense outside their original albums' thematic unity, and ends with the dogged ineptitude of their 1978 first single. There are still some extraordinary songs here — no other band this tough has ever inter-



John Lennon imagines a new sweater.

rogated the mythology of rock as violently — and if the point is to demonstrate the Mekons' range, it succeeds. But their range calls for a focus and selectiveness that's missing here.

DOUGLAS WOLK

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Memphis, Egypt," "Where Were You"

MINISTRY

EARLY TRAX ★★

SIDE TRAX ★★

REVOLTING COCKS

BIG SEXY LAND ★★

YOU GODDAMNED SON OF A BITCH ★★

BEERS, STEERS & QUEERS ★★

RYKODISC

Al Jourgensen's industrial revolution: the early years



During the '80s, Al Jourgensen was so busy establishing industrial music, it's a wonder he found

time to sustain his heroin habit. The Cuban-born provocateur, who began the decade as a pallid, gothic synth-popper, ended it as the Stetson-wearing ringleader of a whole movement, captaining multiple bands and side-projects. Unsurprisingly, quality levels wobbled. His false start, represented on *Early Trax*, doesn't bear reviving. *Revolting Cocks'* Public Image-influenced disco-punk (*Big Sexy Land*) was brutally potent, but monochrome, and it took a concert recording (*You Goddamned Son of a Bitch*) to bring the songs to psychotic life. And although *Beers, Steers & Queers* boasts a Gonzo classic (the snorting redneck hip-hop title track), Jourgensen sustained his momentum better on one-offs than on albums. The *Side Trax* compilation stampedes from militant indignation (Pailhead, fronted by Fugazi's Ian MacKaye) to knowingly ridiculous über-metal (1000 Homo DJs' monolithic cover of Black Sabbath's "Supernaut," featuring Trent →



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"I like how experimental they are, and how they incorporate that into traditional music. They do it well, much like Radiohead."

Reznor of Nine Inch Nails and Jello Biafra of the Dead Kennedys), capturing Jourgensen in his bone-crushing, empire-building prime.

DORIAN LYNSEY

DOWNLOAD THIS: 1000 Homo DJs, "Supernaut," Revolting Cocks, "Beers, Steers & Queers"

SWELL MAPS

A TRIP TO MARINEVILLE

★★★★

JANE FROM OCCUPIED EUROPE

★★★★★

SECRETLY CANADIAN

Art-punk British fireballs who inspired Sonic Youth and Pavement

The core of Swell Maps played together for seven years before the punk explosion dragged them out of the garage. Their 1979 debut, *Marineville*, careens between deranged 72-second riff-rockers and inspired free-form jams: They're sloppy as a drunken football team, but glow with the joy of pure electric noise. "Do you believe in art!" Nikki Sudden yowls (and it's a demand, not a question). The brilliantly sequenced, half-improvised *Jane from Occupied Europe* (1980) is where their glam roots and racket-making get down and dirty together: a glorious mess, stuffed with splattery bursts of organ, backing vocals, handclaps and random interference from toys and typewriters. It takes some effort to acclimate to it, but subsequent generations of indie-rock were planted in this chaotic soil.

DOUGLAS WOLK

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Vertical Slum," "Harmony In Your Bathroom," "Collision with a Frogman," "Secret Island"

VARIOUS ARTISTS

DFA COMPILATION #2

★★★★

Three-discs from NYC producers who have guided the Rapture — and Britney

What happens when smart people make stupid music? Since 2001, the production duo DFA has pumped out answers to this riddle, offsetting a vinyl snob's obsessions with a Nelly fan's desire to twerk that ass. They lace disco with a punk edge and strip it to a lean, rocketing crispness. Top of the heap is LCD Soundsystem's "Yeah" (Crass Version), which morphs a live band into a storm of electric laments and analog scuzz. Back from the '80s, white-funk Liquid Liquid negotiate a dynamic junkyard of metal clangs and African polyrhythms on "Bellhead." The fat dance pulses buy some time for the more experimental Pixeltan ("That's the Way I like It") and Black Dice ("Wasted"), and prove nerds can get crunk, too.

JONAH WEINER

DOWNLOAD THESE: LCD Soundsystem, "Yeah," Liquid Liquid, "Bellhead"



The Verve's blue period kind of sucked.

VARIOUS ARTISTS

THIS IS REGGAE MUSIC: THE GOLDEN ERA 1960-1975

★★★★

SANCTUARY/TROJAN

The glory years of Jamaica's second strongest export

Summarizing the best fifteen-year stretch of Jamaican pop music — starting eight years before singer Toots Hibbert coined the name "reggae" to describe the new, laid-

back sound, and encompassing the island's earlier, peppier ska and rocksteady eras — is tough to pull off on four chronological discs, and Trojan has already cranked out almost fifty triple-disc boxes, each genre-specific. But even though most of these songs will be familiar to reggae fans, it's hard to argue with any of the selections. Recorded as quickly and cheaply as possible, the songs borrow freely from American R&B, and transmute it into something entirely homegrown. By the last

BLENDER APPROVED

The best REISSUES of the last few months



TONY BENNETT

FIFTY YEARS

RPM/COLUMBIA

This definitive anthology follows the lounge god from his honey-dipped heartthrob youth to suave late-career nostalgia.



JANIS JOPLIN

PEARL (LEGACY EDITION)

COLUMBIA/LEGACY

Released shortly after Joplin's OD, this 1971 album features her most enduring songs — and, here, demos and live cuts.



CAN

EGE BAMYASI

MUTE

From 1972, this German Kraut rock quintet's most hypnotic album treats its ambient tone poems to a crisp remaster.



KORN

GREATEST HITS VOL. 1

IMMORTAL/EPIC

The California rap-rock founders who turned ugliness into their muse get a career-spanning retrospective.

volume, artists like Bob Marley and Jimmy Cliff are going global, but no other scene this small and essentially local has ever surpassed the sound of Jamaica singing to itself.

DOUGLAS WOLK

DOWNLOAD THESE: Melodians, "Rivers of Babylon"; Desmond Dekker, "Israelites"

THE VERVE

THIS IS MUSIC: THE SINGLES '92-'98

★★★★

VIRGIN

English band rip off the Rolling Stones, live to regret it



The Verve were led by singer Richard Ashcroft, who showed up in the early '90s with an elastic rock-star tenor and the convincing air of having invented leather trousers. With the huge guitar atmospherics of "This Is Music," the melodically cozier "Lucky Man," and lots of other perfect shifts, they commanded a huge stylistic dexterity. They also made more elaborate use of the orchestral strings they'd layered behind their guitars, and hit with their great "Bittersweet Symphony," a lilting, virile ballad that sampled a Rolling Stones song without a license, and thus landed the Verve in a world of legal and financial hurt. They would enter history even without the heavenly hell of "The Drugs Don't Work," a masterwork of smack and tears.

JAMES HUNTER

DOWNLOAD THESE: "On Your Own," "Slide Away," "Sonnet"

WU-TANG CLAN

LEGEND OF THE WU-TANG: GREATEST HITS

★★★★

BMG HERITAGE

The house that RZA built gets a wobbly trophy room tacked on

The average MC's chances at a long-lasting career are about as good as a suicide bomber's, but these Staten Island freaks beat the odds. Wu domination once seemed unlikely (their 1993 debut was a defiant assault of muddy sonic menace and Chopsocky mythology). But by 1997, they were the world's finest, hottest rap group: With idiosyncratic tales and ingeniously warped beats (there'd be no Kanye West without RZA), they set a nine-man bizarre universe atop the chart. Wu aren't singles artists, and with only three rarities, this lopsided set overrepresents their debut (seven of the 16 songs here) and shortchanges the recent past, when they cranked out adventurous, commercially irrelevant music.

JONAH WEINER

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Diesel," "Protect Ya Neck," "Triumph"

REISSUES IN BRIEF BY JON YOUNG

Saves the Day
hated being on
The Apprentice.



ELIZABETH COTTON

SHAKE SUGAREE ★★★★★

SMITHSONIAN FOLKWAYS

Championed by modern blues traditionalist Taj Mahal, covered by expert historians Bob Dylan and the Grateful Dead, North Carolina native Cotton was already 70 when she cut these spellbinding country-blues tracks in the mid-'60s. The sly, quiet vocals sparkle, but her gorgeous guitar picking is the stuff of ecstasy, shimmering and sweet.

JERRY GARCIA BAND

AFTER MIDNIGHT: KEAN COLLEGE, 2/28/80 ★★★★★

RHINO

Around 4 a.m. is more like it. Blurring the line between laidback and unconscious in a nearly three-hour set, Garcia glides through endless readings of Dylan's "Simple Twist of Fate" (17 minutes) and "Knockin' on Heaven's Door" (13 minutes), his winding guitar solos adding new details to the melodies.

SAVES THE DAY

UPS & DOWNS: EARLY RECORDINGS AND B-SIDES ★★★★★

VAGRANT

Going all the way back to a punky pre-STD single by then-15-year-old Chris Conley, this hodgepodge confirms his knack for capturing everyday drama without cliché. While the acoustic tracks give too much space to Conley's whine, electric guitars restore the balance that's earned them tours with Dashboard Confessional and Green Day.

The Turtles: "What the hell are we laughing about?"



THE TURTLES

HAPPY TOGETHER: THE VERY BEST OF THE TURTLES ★★★★★

SHOUT! FACTORY

Wimpier than the Byrds, tougher than the Mamas and the Papas, the Turtles made creamy West Coast pop with few peers. Their best songs were more than disposable fluff: The chirpy 1967 smash "Happy Together" is actually a sad-eyed tale of unrequited love.

VARIOUS ARTISTS

RUDOLPH THE RED-NOSED REINDEER ★★★★★

BEAR FAMILY

Only the insane could enjoy such a high-concept exercise, which collects 25 versions of this annoying Christmas-time staple. Soulful appearances by Fats Domino and the Crystals aside, the inane performances — from Dean Martin to Dolly Parton to the Chipmunks — could send seasonal depressives over the edge.

VARIOUS ARTISTS

WHEELIE'S GROOVE: SEATTLE'S FINEST IN FUNK & SOUL 1965-1975 ★★★★★

LIGHT IN THE ATTIC

If sweat equaled success, the nobodies on this intriguing slice of archeology would be superstars. Highlights include the Soul Swingers' "Brighter Tomorrow," a crackling counterfeit of deep-south R&B, and a trance-like cocktail jazz take on the Beatles' "Hey Jude" by pianist Overton Berry.

VARIOUS ARTISTS

ECCENTRIC SOUL: THE CAPSOUL LABEL ★★★★★

NUMERO GROUP

Working out of Columbus, Ohio, Capsoul wanted to be another Motown, only to collapse into bankruptcy in 1974 after a few years. The label's output ranged from pedestrian to amazing, the best being Elijah and Ebonites' blazing instrumental "Hot Grits!!!" and Kool Blues' red-hot "I'm Gonna Keep on Loving You," which is definitely not the later REO Speedwagon song of the same name.

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three imaginary boys

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POP'S
GREATEST
LIVE
PERFORMER

As he launches into two and a half solid hours of hits, the cloud of smoke clears. Prince has announced he's playing many of these songs for the last time. (Kiss and Cher didn't stick to their similar promises; we'll see about Prince.) After 10 years on the fringes of pop, he wants a new generation to know how he rolls. Call it "reinvesting in the infrastructure," because familiar as they are, "I Would Die 4 U" and "Raspberry Beret" have never sounded better.

And as Prince flaunts his catalogue, he also ends up flaunting the band, showing off the versatile, jammy, eight-member New Power Generation. They string classics into smooth medleys, turn "DMSR" into a James Brown-style workout, and sound tight when Prince launches into a version of Led Zeppelin's "Whole Lotta Love."

As the show wears on, it's clear Prince has cleaned up. There's no "Darling Nikki," the song that alarmed government officials in the '80s, no scantily clad backup vocalists draping themselves across the star. Maybe it's faith that's taken him away from the lascivious (if not the glamorous) life, or a byproduct of being middle-aged in an era of teen-pop phenoms.

Indeed, he seems to take on the TRL nation in various between-song remarks — after a workout on "When Doves Cry," he puffs out his chest and boasts, "This is real music by real musicians." Bashing high-tech pop is a slightly odd

thing to do in the Silicon Valley, but now that he's a missionary, he must not mind preaching to the unconverted.

There's only one way for Prince to end a greatest-hits show, and it involves a purple guitar shaped like the symbol he invented when he discarded the name "Prince." He straps on this long appendage, and turns "Purple Rain" into a 10-minute gospel shower. Everybody in the house is on their feet, drenched in sweat that appears purple under the light. R.J. SMITH

Still the King

After years on the fringe, Prince regains his crown — without cussing

PRINCE

HP PAVILION, SAN JOSE, CA

SEPTEMBER 10, 2004 ★★★★★

AT THE EXACT moment when Prince makes his fire-and-brimstone entrance rising through a smoke-gushing hole in the stage floor of the HP Pavilion, an unsmiling man stands outside the San Jose arena. Using a bull-horn, he shouts fundamentalist criticism of Prince and his fans: "You are weak! You will feel the fire! There's no party in hell!"

Over the past 25 years, Prince has earned renown as pop's top pervert, celebrating excess in songs about weird sex and masturbation, and in stage shows full of, well, simulated weird sex and masturbation. At the height of his notoriety in 1985, his lyrics almost single-handedly incited a Congressional hearing and inspired the "parental advisory" sticker.

But on the penultimate night of a six-month arena tour that

sold 1.4 million tickets and grossed \$86 million in sales, he's playing on a cross-shaped stage and is refusing to include his dirtiest older songs. How can such a newly devout gentleman — a Jehovah's Witness convert who even goes door-knocking trying to enlighten nonbelievers — still drive Bible-thumpers nuts? Will the performance be perverted or

holy? Devoted to the Man Upstairs or the Party Down Below?

The audience of nearly 17,000 is split evenly between boomers who grew up with him (many, unfortunately, dressed as psychedelic pimps and hos) and young folks just discovering Prince. Their indoctrination starts at the door, where

everybody in the sold-out house is handed copies of *Musicology*, Prince's latest CD. The cost of *Musicology* is included in the \$75 ticket, which allows all those "sales" to count toward the *Billboard* chart, effectively securing Prince a spot on the Top 10 for the duration of his tour.

But as the night gets underway and Prince plays only a few *Musicology* tunes, the point of the tour comes clear: It's a festive examination of his music, rather than the outrageous antics that made him famous.



HE WANTS A NEW
GENERATION TO
SEE HOW HE ROLLS.



Jenny Lewis:
"Tickle me, slaves!
Tickle me!"

Life of Kiley

Hollywood indie band auditions for greatness

RILO KILEY

NEUMO'S, SEATTLE

SEPTEMBER 25, 2004 ★★★★★

THE ALPHA KIDS are on fire for Rilo Kiley. As they shove — politely, of course — to get a better view, their clean-cut heads bob to the beautifully constructed clamor. Seattle has been nuts for indie rock since the days when Kurt Cobain was only a local hero, and Rilo Kiley has roots here: Singer Jenny Lewis moonlights in the Postal Service with Seattle emo icon Ben Gibbard.

Still, Rilo Kiley guitarist Blake Sennett can't help but gush. "Thanks for bein' so nice to us," he enthuses halfway through the set. "This is a pretty good music town, so, I don't know, we're pretty honored you came out." His banter is as wimpy as his band's songs are clever, but no one minds. Ambition matters more than slickness to the young achievers at his feet.

Rilo Kiley fled Saddle Creek, the coolest indie label in the country, for a corporate alliance with Warner Bros., and the arrival of marketing money coincides with an artistic breakthrough on

their third album, *More Adventurous*. Like the Shins and Death Cab For Cutie, moderate stardom now seems inevitable. Adorable as they are — every member looks like a once or future date for a Gyllenhaal — Rilo Kiley value old-fashioned songcraft, and that's what makes their future so sure.

There's no angsty posing during Rilo's hour. Sennett and Lewis keep their heads down and focus on their instruments, as other members, including modest horn and string sections, bop through loose arrangements full of witty interplay. For these trendsetters, understatement is the new glam.

"This next one's a love song — sort of a love song. Well, a bitter little love song," Lewis, 27, says before the torchy "I Never." Though she leans into the crowd, she pulls back slightly, letting her words do the touching. "I'm not my body or how I choose to destroy it," she drawls, her voice like taffy being pulled, her eyes downcast in sardonic modesty.

Lewis, a former child actor, has clearly worked on her look: Her coppery halter matches her russet hair. When she repeats the phrase, "I'm bad news," in the semi-hit "Portions for Foxes," she projects the opposite: The only thing this go-getter gets messed up is her own head. Her former paramour Sennett plays twin brother; nary a spark flies between them. He shows a Crispin Glover edge in the set, taking an Allmans-esque solo on "Three Hopeful Thoughts." Lewis eggs him on with a yelp: "Go!" It's the hottest moment of the night.

"THIS ONE'S A LOVE SONG. WELL, A BITTER LOVE SONG."

The alpha kids aren't here for sex, a theme Lewis ponders with regret, longing and, ultimately, hope. On some level, the music is all about hope — dark as some of Lewis's scenarios can be, Rilo Kiley's harmonious constructions always suggest beauty will triumph.

As the band plays, a slide show asks, "What if everyone at this show voted on November 2nd?" The band is preaching to the choir. Do they really think any of their fans won't "drive safe and remember to vote," as Lewis urges them at the set's end? The future belongs to these virtuous believers, and they're not the types to blow it. ANN POWERS



grand theft auto

GAME BOY ADVANCE

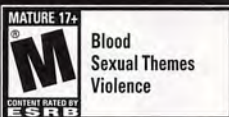


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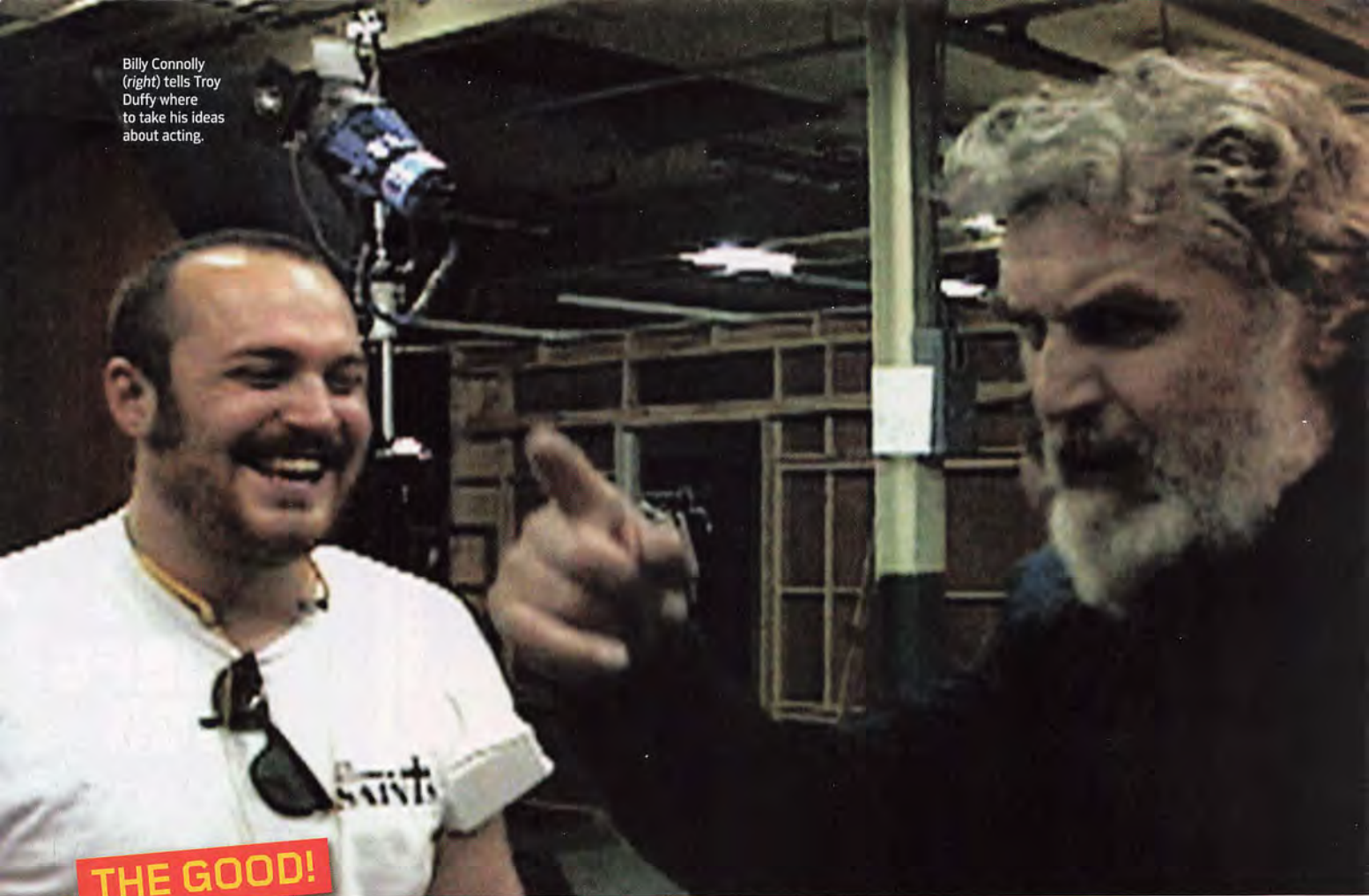


GAME BOY ADVANCE



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Billy Connolly (right) tells Troy Duffy where to take his ideas about acting.



THE GOOD!

LIGHTS! CAMERA! FAILURE!

In this doc, one man is handed the world on a plate. Then he drops the plate. By Clark Collis

OVERNIGHT

DIRECTED BY Mark Brian Smith, Tony Montana

STARRING Troy Duffy, Willem Dafoe, Billy Connolly

IN HOLLYWOOD, YOU need to be very brave, very stupid or very drunk to refer to a high-ranking female movie executive as “a fucking cunt” — on camera. But, then, “brave, stupid and drunk”

is not a bad thumbnail sketch of Troy Duffy, the writer-director responsible for that particular epithet and the star of *Overnight*, a documentary which traces the rise and fall of his unforgettable stint in Tinseltown.

In 1996, the then 25-year-old Duffy was working at a Hollywood dive bar called J. Sloan's when Miramax offered him a deal to direct his own violent vigilante script, *The Boondock Saints*.

Miramax boss Harvey Weinstein also offered to buy him the bar. Before long, Duffy was holding court at J. Sloan's, boozing it up with his newfound Hollywood buddies Jake Busey and Jerry O'Connell.

When Maverick Records also weighed in, offering him a record deal for his band, the Brood, life certainly could not have been sweeter for Duffy and what he describes at one point in *Overnight* as his “deep cesspool [sic] of creativity.”

Alas, both Miramax and Maverick subsequently decided his was a “cesspool” they could do without. Duffy responded by becoming even more overbearing egomaniacal than before, refusing to give his band's co-managers, Mark Brian Smith and Tony Montana, any money from a new record deal.

This would prove to be a big mistake, given that Smith and Montana had been put in charge of co-directing a doc about Duffy.

And, from that point on, the pair seems to have made it their life's mission to document every second of Duffy's increasingly berserk, paranoid

and downright unpleasant behavior as he finally makes his own movie, only for it to open on a miserly four screens.

A venomous study of megalomania, *Overnight* is not unlike a much, much more entertaining version of *Project Greenlight*, HBO's let's-make-a-movie reality show that was made, ironically, by Miramax.

It also proves once again that revenge is indeed a dish best served cold — and on more screens than the movie made by the guy who screwed you over in the first place.

IT'S A VENOMOUS STUDY OF MEGALOMANIA.

Troy Duffy: “See, papercuts aren't so... argh!”





THE BAD!

CHRISTMAS WITH THE KRANKS

DIRECTED BY Joe Roth

STARRING Tim Allen, Jamie Lee Curtis

When *Blender* looks in the mirror, it sees a disturbed, frightened individual whose eyes have seen too much. Specifically, a documentary about the seemingly mirth-free *Christmas With the Kranks*, which, earlier this fall, we had the misfortune to catch repeatedly as part of our local multiplex's pre-movie "entertainment." Tim Allen plays the cranky Luther Krank — see what they did there? — whose plan to ignore Christmas is ruined when his daughter decides at the last moment to come home for the festive season. Dan Aykroyd is also, alas, involved. Perfect for kids — whom you hate.



& THE INDIE!

THE WOODSMAN

DIRECTED BY Nicole Kassell

STARRING Kevin Bacon, Kyra Sedgwick, Eve

What says "festive season" more than a low-budget drama about child molestation? Everything else! But that's no reason to miss this brilliantly acted, controversially sympathetic study of Kevin Bacon's supposedly reformed pedophile as he returns to society. Kyra Sedgwick believably spars with her real-life husband as his equally fragile love interest while Eve and Mos Def give their best performances yet, playing bitchy secretary and vicious cop, respectively. However it's Bacon who will be happy once the Academy has made its list and checked it twice. *DAMON WISE*



BLENDER APPROVED

The best MOVIES of 2004



DIG!

PALM PICTURES

Unfeasibly fascinating documentary about the Dandy Warhols and Brian Jonestown Massacre.



DAWN OF THE DEAD

UNIVERSAL STUDIOS HOME VIDEO

What's scarier than flesh-eating zombies? Running flesh-eating zombies!



MEAN GIRLS

PARAMOUNT HOME ENT.

Scriptwriter Tina Fey and star Lindsay Lohan offer up the best high school movie since *Heathers*.

AND THE REST...



LEMONY SNICKET'S SERIES OF UNFORTUNATE EVENTS

DIRECTED BY Brad Silberling

STARRING Jim Carrey, Meryl Streep, Jude Law

THE PITCH After their parents get killed in a fire, three children are sent to live with Jim Carrey's cruel Count Olaf.

THE VERDICT Promises to be a blackly comic Tim Burton-esque holiday-classic-in-the-making.



THE LIFE AQUATIC WITH STEVE ZISSOU

DIRECTED BY Wes Anderson

STARRING Bill Murray, Cate Blanchett, Owen Wilson, Willem Dafoe, Jeff Goldblum

THE PITCH Demented oceanographer Murray hunts the shark who ate his best friend.

THE VERDICT Anderson is a bona fide genius, as is Murray. And the trailer is hilarious. Oh, and *Blender's* writing this while lined up outside the theater.



OCEAN'S TWELVE

DIRECTED BY Steven Soderbergh

STARRING George Clooney, Brad Pitt

THE PITCH Three years after ripping off Vegas casinos, Clooney's gang is back together for more heists, this time in Europe!

THE VERDICT Since the original was one of the slickest blockbusters in years, Clooney and co. could've spent the shoot partying — which they did — and still come up with something decent.



MEET THE FOCKERS

DIRECTED BY Jay Roach

STARRING Ben Stiller, Robert De Niro, Barbra Streisand, Dustin Hoffman

THE PITCH *Meet the Parents* sequel that finds De Niro forced to hang out with Stiller's folks: nutty left-winger Hoffman and sex therapist Streisand.

THE VERDICT Should be as funny as the original, especially if Stiller gets to "milk" De Niro's nipples this time around.



THE FLIGHT OF THE PHOENIX

DIRECTED BY John Moore

STARRING Dennis Quaid

THE PITCH When their plane crashes in the middle of the Mongolian desert, Quaid and friends must build another plane out of the wreckage. Or die!

THE VERDICT Don't count on catching this remake of the '60s semi-classic helmed by downed-plane-drama specialist John Moore as an in-flight movie.



NATIONAL TREASURE

DIRECTED BY Jon Turteltaub

STARRING Nicolas Cage, Harvey Keitel

THE PITCH Cage has to steal the Declaration of Independence to study its secret hidden map. Whaddaya mean you didn't know about the secret hidden map?

THE VERDICT A ludicrous premise? Yes. More ludicrous than Jerry Bruckheimer's previous action spectacles? Actually, yes again. But not by much.

DON'T MISS

DON'T RUSH

1 MECCA 5-STAR FORRESTER CREW SWEATSHIRT

Want to keep warm in the winter but cool all year round? The folks at Mecca have come up with a way of fulfilling that dream with their 5-Star Forrester Crew Sweatshirt, part of their Beef n' Broccoli line. Meccausa.com

2 NORELCO COOL SKIN 7000

Norelco's Cool Skin 7000 Series shaves as close as a blade but with less irritation, thanks to the built-in Nivea For Men lotion. Norelco.com/coolskin

3 SIRIUS SPORTSTER

The Sirius Sportster lets you listen commercial-free to any type of music you can imagine, as well as NFL, NBA and NHL games. Sirius.com

4 GUESS? SADDLE-UP

Show off your sense of style and fun with this black leather cuff watch, which has a brushed-leather face and buckle. Guess.com

5 CABO WABO TEQUILA

It's not just tequila, it's a way of life. Sammy Hagar's way of life! You can thank the Van Halen frontman for ensuring his tequila contains the finest all-natural ingredients for a smoother taste. Cabowabo.com

6 OP CARVIN FIBER SKATEBOARD

Inspired by retro fiberglass boards, but updated with modern materials, OP's skateboard is built for speed. Op.com

7 IRIVER H300

This digital music player will hold 1,200 hours of your favorite songs. Plus, you can store digital pictures and view them on the color display. Iriveramerica.com

8 NINTENDO DS

Playing videogames just got more exciting! The Nintendo DS has two screens, one of which is pressure-sensitive, enabling you to play in a new way. Circuitcity.com

9 ROCAWEAR PLAYA PACK

Includes a limited-edition black basketball autographed by Jay-Z and Damon Dash, and a Rocafella compilation CD. Rocawear.com

10 QUIKSILVER FLEECE

This super-cozy zip fleece is perfect for those days when you think, "Hey, it's cold." Quiksilver.com

11 BOSE SOUNDDOCK

If your iPod could talk it would probably say, "Get me a Bose SoundDock. It's small in size, but powerful in sound, has an infrared remote and will charge me up while I'm docked!" Bose.com



The Von Bondies are unduly proud of their shopping-bag collection.



Worried that Santa won't get his fat ass down the chimney this year? Well, fear not – for the

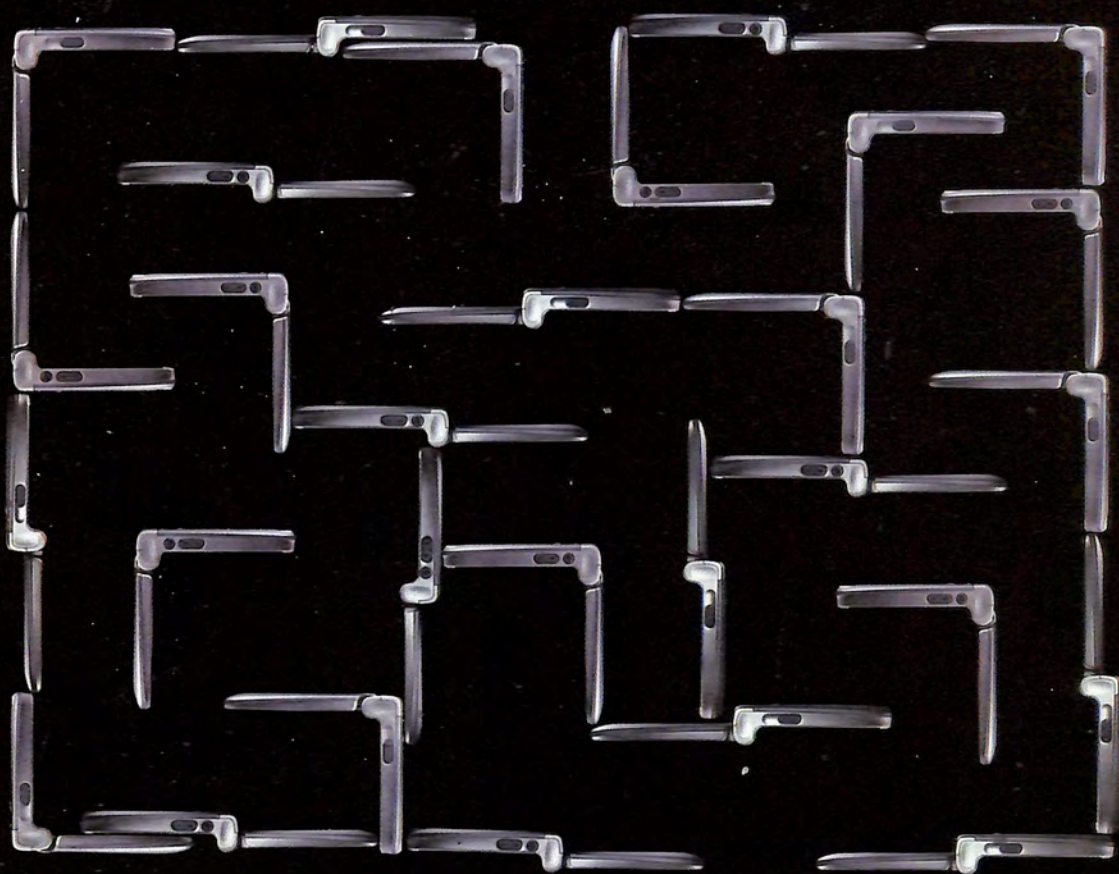
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are here to help you make those all-important present-purchasing decisions.

HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE

#1 ON DON'S WISHLIST: GADGETS

"I need one more thing I'll never learn how to use."





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It's not just a phone—it's a mobile entertainment center. You can play games with amazing 3D graphics. Listen to your favorite songs on MP3. Snap quality photos—you can even make short movies. And by using Edge Connectivity, it can all be downloaded and shared in a flash. Who knows—you might even get around to using it to place a call. | www.sonyericsson.com/z500a

*The phone shown is available exclusively at Cingular



12 BEN SHERMAN COCK TRACK JACKET

At last you can combine your love of Ye Olde English-style pub signs and wearing things with this stylish zip-up sweatshirt. Hoorah!

Bensherman.co.uk

13 BOD MAN® FRAGRANCE TRIO GIFT SET

Women will want his bod after he uses this red-hot new set featuring Fragrance Body Spray, new Fragrance Deodorant Body Spray and BOD Wash, \$10 at Walgreen's and other leading drug and discount stores.

Parfumsdecoeur.com

14 MLB AUTHENTIC COLLECTION

Do you want to play major-league baseball? Hey, we want to be astronauts, but it ain't going to happen, either! But thanks to MLB, you can wear exactly what the players of all 30 Major League Baseball Clubs wear on the field! MLB.com

15 OAKLEY THUMP

The world's first digital music eyewear. No more wires. Just high-performance optics forged with an integrated, state-of-the-art digital audio engine. Oakley.com

16 JL AUDIO GOTHAM

Is that the sound of Godzilla demolishing Tokyo? Well, it could be. But, more likely, it's one of your neighbors using a JL Audio Gotham subwoofer in his home theater. With twin 13.5 inch speakers and 3800 watts of power this redefines the phrase, "Criminy, that's one loud speaker." JLaudio.com

17 XMODS RC
Just like the real thing in every way — except, um, size — the XMODS RC comes complete with true-to-spec



modular body and proportional steering system for a realistic racing experience. Xmodsrc.com

18 MIKE SHINODA/DC CLIENTELE REMIX SHOE

Be kind to your soles and your soul with this skateboarding shoe developed by Linkin Park's Mike Shinoda and DC Shoes. Profits will help fund a scholarship program at Art Center College. Design.dcsneakers.com

19 B&W MINI THEATER SPEAKER SYSTEM

Big is beautiful? No! Small is beautiful, yet still powerful, as these all new, ultra-compact speakers prove. Bwspeakers.com

20 SONY ERICSSON Z500a PHONE

Think phones are just a more convenient

way of communicating with faraway friends than shouting? Well, prepare for a surprise with the Z500a which has 3D games, MP3 ringtones and a built-in V64 camera. Sonyericsson.com/z500a

21 SPOT WATCH

The Spot Watch gives you the local weather, news headlines, stock quotes and instant messages. If you're really nice to it, it might even tell you the time. msndirect.com

22 SONOS DIGITAL MUSIC SYSTEM

They say you can't take it with you. But you can with the Sonos Digital Music System if the "it" in question is all your favorite music and the place you want to take it is anywhere in the house. The first and only multi-zone digital music system, it has a wireless, full-color screen which allows you to access, customize and control music anywhere, from bedroom to backyard. Sonos.com



23 TAPWAVE ZODIAC ENTERTAINMENT CONSOLE

It plays games! And MP3s! And it's a clock, calculator and appointment book! All hail the Tapwave Zodiac Entertainment Console! Tapwave.com

24 KSWISS CLASSIC

The awesome trainer from KSWISS, makers of shoe-related awesomeness since 1966. Kswiss.com

25 LE TIGRE

A clean line-sporting tonal raglan sleeve track jacket from the purveyors of classic American apparel. Holdthattiger.com

26 ZOO YORK ATLANTIC

Say adieu — if you're French — to being wet! But whatever your nationality, this 100-percent canvas raincoat with oil coat will keep you bone dry. Zooyork.com

27 CURVE

Crush for Him and Crush for Her are

fragrances for close encounters. Curvefragrances.com

28 DRUNKMUNKY CHIEF WOVEN AND COMMANDER PANT

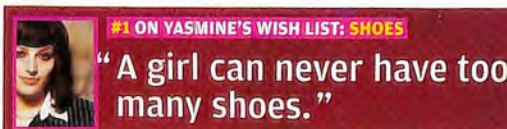
This shirt and pants combo is made from 100 percent cotton mini-herringbone (note — no herrings were injured in the construction of these clothes). Drunkmunky.com

29 BLACKBERRY 7100T

You got full features with this mobile phone which has e-mail, ringtones and a color screen. Tmobile.com

30 SUBARU IMPREZA WRX

The ultimate in high performance rally-bred cars. Features a Symmetrical All-Wheel Drive that channels the power of a 227-hp turbocharged 2.0 liter boxer engine. Subaru.com



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SQUAD FIVE-O LATE NEWS BREAKING
Major label debut from Clash- and Stones-loving rockers. SQUADFIVE-O.COM



THE DONNAS GOLD MEDAL
They may have dropped their "Donna" surnames but not their desire to rock out. THEDONNAS.COM ATLANTICRECORDS.COM



SIMPLE PLAN STILL NOT GETTING ANY...
Second album of classic pop-punk from last year's gift guide hosts. SIMPLEPLAN.COM



LETTER KILLS THE BRIDGE
The SoCal quintet succeed in capturing the thunderous kineticism of their live performances. LETTERKILLS.COM



THE SHORE THE SHORE
Debut album of psychedelic pop from the well-regarded Los Angeles trio. THESHOREMUSIC.COM



SHADOW FALLS THE WAR WITHIN
Brutal but beautiful fourth release from the Massachusetts riff-mongers. SHADOWSFALLROCKS.COM



VANESSA CARLTON HARMONIUM
Sophomore collection of piano-driven pop from the hippy-minded chanteuse. VANESSACARLTON.COM



ELVIS COSTELLO & THE IMPOSTERS THE DELIVERY MAN
Bitter-sweet return to form for the songwriter supreme. ELVISCOSTELLO.COM



NIRVANA NIRVANA
Long-awaited 3CD collection of rare and previously unreleased material. NIRVANA.COM



JOHN MELLENCAMP WORDS & MUSIC: JOHN MELLENCAMP'S GREATEST HITS
Career-spanning two-CD compilation. MELLENCAMP.COM



VARIOUS ARTISTS HIP-HOP BOX
35 remastered classics, including hits from Dr Dre, Public Enemy, 2Pac, 50 Cent and Method Man. HIPHOPBOXSET.COM



THE GRATEFUL DEAD THE GRATEFUL DEAD MOVIE
A full-length concert, plus 95 minutes of never-before-seen live footage. MONTEREYMEDIA.COM



THE OFFICE THE COLLECTION
The first — and last — two seasons of the funniest British sitcom since Fawlty Towers. BBCAMERICA.COM



LENNY BRUCE LET THE BUYER BEWARE
Comedy's most controversial stand-up comic, honored in this six-CD set. SHOUTFACTORY.COM



SPIDER-MAN 2
The web-slinger's second big-screen adventure arrives on DVD with more than 10 hours of all-new content. SONYPICTURES.COM/HOMEMEDIA



TRUE CRIME
In this video game you are an out-of-control ex-cop who must take out LA crime syndicates. TRUECRIMEA.COM



TONY HAWK'S UNDERGROUND 2
Battle Jackass maniac Bam Margera on an insane road trip! Don't forget to send a card! THUGSONLINE.COM



YADA-YADA-YADA

SEINFELD: THE COMPLETE FIRST, SECOND AND THIRD SEASONS

★★★★

The conclusion of the survey? "No segment of the audience was eager to watch the show again." However, the show's most potentially crippling comment came from Jerry Seinfeld himself who, when NBC halfheartedly committed to another quartet of episodes, asked fellow co-creator Larry David, "How the hell are we going to do four more of these things?"

History would prove that *Seinfeld* was in fact capable of doing almost an entire decade's worth of those things. And, while they may have supposedly been about "nothing," it was a nothing

with bizarre plotlines (George accidentally kills his fiancée, Jerry is forced to wear a puffy shirt on TV), catchphrases ("Master of my domain," "Serenity now!"), and even minor characters (Bubble Boy, the Soup Nazi) now seem like old, if weird, friends.

But precious few of those friends turn up in this first batch of episodes ever on DVD. Indeed, you can at times see what that initial preview audience was getting at. The pilot episode doesn't even feature Julia Louis-Dreyfus — whose character, Elaine, was subsequently added

at NBC's insistence. And while early shows like "The Chinese Restaurant" or "The Pez Dispenser" are twice as funny as

pretty much anything on TV at the moment, they feature too little in the way of the surreal and too much in the way of Jerry Seinfeld's frankly nonexistent acting chops.

Where these DVDs do deliver the goods, however, is in their extras. The Season One–Season Two set, as well as the Season Three collection, offer 13 hours of bonus materials, including interviews, deleted scenes, never-before-seen stand-up, a documentary and other assorted yada-yada-yada.

THE GUIDE DVDs

★ ★

The most interesting thing about this gruelingly hyperactive version of Jules Verne's yarn is that it appears to have been filmed in real time. Steve Coogan, so good in *24 Hour Party People*, is unappealing as the globe-trotting scientist-hero, while sidekick Jackie Chan seems determined to show just how far he's fallen since his bone-crunching Hong Kong heyday. However, Arnold Schwarzenegger utterly convinces in a cameo as a sexually harassing, if oddly accented, Arabian prince.

DR. STRANGELOVE

★★★★★

You can't fight here! This is the War Room!" Anyone who thinks nuclear holocaust is not a suitable subject for comedy has clearly never seen Stanley Kubrick's 1964 masterpiece. The awesome Sterling Hayden plays a U.S. general who unleashes his bombers on the Russians to prevent them tampering with his "precious bodily fluids." The sublime Peter Sellers plays pretty much everyone else, including the fabulously named



President Merkin Muffley. Written by counterculture nutjob genius Terry Southern, the result stands as one of the funniest, and certainly the blackest, comedies of all time.

HARRY POTTER AND THE PRISONER OF AZKABAN

When Y Tu Mamá También director Alfonso Cuarón took charge of the third *Harry Potter* flick, some feared he would corrupt J.K. Rowling's crew of magical moppets into beer-swilling horndogs. That scenario is, thankfully, still the sole provenance of creepy fan fiction. Instead, Cuarón gently tweaks the source material for a darker and vastly more entertaining take on the Potter-verse. The stunt casting of heavyweights Gary Oldman and David Thewlis, enjoying themselves enormously in supporting roles, only adds to the sickly anarchic proceedings. Includes never-before-seen footage and a "Singalong" with the Hogwarts choir.

HOW TO DRAW A BUNNY

★★★★

"He wasn't into narcotics," Ray Johnson's friend Billy Name says in this documentary about the cult New York collage and conceptual artist. "He was already high all the time — people would get high on things to get where he was." It seems like an accurate assessment of a man whose "art happenings" included throwing foot-long hot dogs out of a helicopter, and, the film posits, drowning himself in 1995. Featuring interviews with fellow artists Roy Lichtenstein and Christo, the DVD includes a director's commentary and gallery of Johnson's painstakingly detailed work.



Ali G's "Simon Says" contest with Isaac Hayes (right) reaches hour three.

THE OFFICE SPECIAL

BBC VIDEO

★★★★

The last ever two episodes of the multiple Golden Globe-winning BBC sitcom finds the show's bickering white-collar drones preparing for their Christmas party while loathsome sacked boss David Brent (Ricky Gervais) attempts to exploit his new-found reality-show micro fame. Best line: "Can we not talk about my dead mother's breasts?" Extras include a hilariously diabolical video which finds Gervais's character performing "If You Don't Know Me By Now."

SHREK 2

UNIVERSAL STUDIOS HOME VIDEO

★★★★

"Oh, Shrek, don't worry. Things just seem bad because it's dark and rainy and Fiona's father hired a sleazy hitman to whack you." Utterly satisfying sequel that finds the gang augmented with Antonio Banderas's almost edibly cute assassin, Puss-in-Boots. The feline whacker is recruited by Shrek's prospective father-in-law, John Cleese's King Harold, to make sure he never stomps down the aisle. But the plot is really an excuse for a barrage of

good-to-great jokes that reference *Flashdance*, *Cops*, *Alien*, *Spinal Tap* and damn near everything else that has ever existed.

SPIDER-MAN 2

COLUMBIA TRISTAR HOME ENTERTAINMENT

★★

Spider-Man! Spider-Man! Does whatever your average teen-movie doofus can! OK, so that may be a little hard on the activities of Tobey Maguire's web-slinger in this second franchise entry. But not by much. Certainly, in its first half, there is precious little offered action-wise, as Spidey spends most of his time trying to get to — *whammo!* — the theater, to see a play starring his love interest, Kirsten Dunst. Most of the fun, meanwhile, is to be found in the vicinity of Alfred Molina's suitably demented but tragically under-used Doc Ock. The DVD is loaded up with 10 hours of extras, including featurettes, commentaries and bloopers.

ALI G IN DAHOUSE

UNIVERSAL STUDIOS HOME VIDEO

★★★

Anyone who thinks Britain's most hapless gangsta wannabe would go soft in his bigscreen debut can rest assured the opening minutes of *Indahouse* find Ali receiving genital workouts from two women, a dog and a blind cleaner. Subsequently, for reasons too stupid to go into, Sacha Baron Cohen's comic creation joins the British government to help solve his country's military problems by hiring the A-Team and, in the film's most singularly disturbing moment, discovers that the Queen has a "shaven haven." You'd probably barf if you weren't too busy laughing. Bonus materials include "Me Video Diary" and, of course, "Scenes Not In It."

BLENDER APPROVED

The best DVDs of 2004



AQUA TEEN HUNGER FORCE

WARNER HOME VIDEO

The best fast food-themed New Jersey-set superhero spoof ever!



CURB YOUR ENTHUSIASM: THE COMPLETE SECOND SEASON

HBO HOME VIDEO

Larry David's irritation is our satisfaction in a near-perfect sitcom.



ALIEN QUADRILOGY

20TH CENTURY FOX HOME ENTERTAINMENT

The entire acid-for-blood-tastic horror saga (we're pretending AVP doesn't exist).

MUSIC DVDS

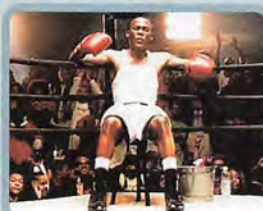


VARIOUS ARTISTS

WATTSTAX WARNER HOME VIDEO

★★★★★

The 1973 Wattstax festival found Isaac Hayes, the Staple Singers and the Bar-Kays performing to mark the anniversary of the Watts riots. All were in top form, proven in this film, which weaves footage with a hilarious Richard Pryor interview. But the moment when Hayes — and Western civilization — reached maximum funkosity was as his band wah-wahed through "Shaft" and Hayes removed his cape to reveal a vest of gold chains. CLARK COLLIS



VARIOUS ARTISTS

BEEF II QD3 ENT./IMAGE ENT.

★★★

From Jay-Z vs. Nas to Hilary vs. Lindsay, the music world's feuds are great fun. For gripping wars of words, though, you're better off watching a high school debate team than plodding through this barrel-scraping documentary. *Beef II* is bogged down in lukewarm showdowns. JONAH WEINER



OASIS

DEFINITELY MAYBE CREATION/SONY

★★★★

"They were doing drugs. Just not as many drugs." That, explains engineer Anjali Dutt, is why *Definitely Maybe* is the best Britpop album ever. The salty Dutt is typical of the gargoyles interviewed for this chirpy making-of doc. The live footage and promo videos are unnecessary. ANDY PEMBERTON



MORCHEEBA

FROM BRIXTON TO BEIJING

RHINO HOME VIDEO

★★★

Long-time purveyors of lush, dinner-party trip-hop, U.K. trio Morcheeba were never the most arresting live act. "The Sea" is an exquisite highlight, but this London concert is a staid affair, and their *Beijing* documentary is unrevealing. NICK DUERDEN



THE RAMONES

RAW IMAGE ENTERTAINMENT

★★

After watching hours of the Ramones goofing off in the world's crappiest hotel lobbies, you too will want to be sedated. Culled from 25 years of random footage, it's a home movie saved only by a peppering of live performances. In these, it's hard to tell 1980 from 1995. ANDREW HARRISON



PRINCE

PURPLE RAIN WARNER HOME VIDEO

★★★★

Ruffled pirate shirts and shoulder-pads notwithstanding, Prince's ultimate battle-of-the-bands film has held up surprisingly well. This 20th-anniversary special edition includes an exhaustive documentary about Minneapolis' First Avenue club, where *Purple Rain* is set. LAUREN HARRIS

"For my next trick,
I will make all your
drugs disappear!"

DON'T TRY
THIS AT
HOME!

DOPE MAN!

Heroin addicts don't come more resourceful (or irresponsible) than **Dave Navarro**! Here's his "10 Ways to Tie Off."

- 1 A guitar cable or strap: "You leave the guitar plugged in, of course."
- 2 Electrical cords from kitchen appliances: "Going to the kitchen creates the illusion that you're not hiding, especially if you've already gone to the bathroom twice that night. If you leave the fridge open and tie off with a nearby electrical cord, it just looks like you're trying to get a drink."
- 3 In particular, cords from toasters: "The toaster weighs the cord down perfectly around your arm so you don't have to use two hands."
- 4 The cord connecting a telephone handset to the receiver: "You can be paging your dealer while doing your last hit."
- 5 The sleeve of a shirt or the leg of a pair of pants: "Usually I'm wearing the shirt or pants. I'll just take off one leg or arm."
- 6 Twiggy Ramirez's dreadlocks: "That's the only live animal I've ever used."
- 7 The sash of a robe: "It's the breakfast of champions."
- 8 A computer-mouse cord: "You can always e-mail 9-1-1 if there's a problem."
- 9 A condom: "Just make sure it's not lubricated, it's not your last one, and you take it off your arm before going back in the room or restaurant."
- 10 Car safety belts: "I've actually gone so far as to reach in the back of the car, grab an empty Coke can, rip it in half, turn it upside down so the little indentation on the bottom becomes its own spoon, and cook the heroin in it. Then I suck it up with a syringe and tie myself off with my shoulder strap, all while driving. I've even gotten [a friend], who's a terrible shot, off while driving."



Excerpted from *Don't Try This at Home*, by Dave Navarro & Neil Strauss, © 2004 by ReganBooks

THE GUIDE BOOKS

BEASTIE BOYS ANTHOLOGY THE SOUNDS OF SCIENCE

Art Direction by Adam Yauch, aka MCA

☆☆☆ POWERHOUSE BOOKS, \$45

In this colorful coffee-table retrospective, the Beasties wax nostalgic about their 20-year career between photos by Beastie buddies Richard Gere and Spike Jonze.



This second edition comes with the trio's 1999 two-CD anthology (also called *The Sounds of Science*), so fans who already sprung for that set may find this one redundant. But the rest will marvel at the wealth of behind-the-scenes trivia — who knew Brass Monkey tastes best when chilled with a lemon Popsicle? **JOSH EELLS**

ELLIOTT SMITH AND THE BIG NOTHING

By Benjamin Nugent

☆☆ DA CAPO PRESS, \$24

Initial suspicions that this rushed book might be a callous attempt to exploit the memory of the recently deceased are unfair;



author Benjamin Nugent displays an affectionate understanding of his subject. Yet while the absence of salacious speculation may be laudable, the lack of interviews with Smith's inner circle leaves Nugent's narrative woefully vague. Still, nice to know that Smith's freak Oscar performance left him with lasting respect for Céline Dion. **VICTORIA SEGAL**

DA CAPO BEST MUSIC WRITING 2004

THE YEAR'S FINEST WRITING ON ROCK, HIP-HOP, JAZZ, POP, COUNTRY & MORE

Mickey Hart, Guest Editor; Paul Bresnick, Series Editor

☆☆☆☆ DA CAPO PRESS, \$16

There's a dewy-eyed "Where'd all the heroes go?" feel to this. The excellent "The Last Hustle" tackles how Jay-Z retired without truly giving of himself; Chuck Klosterman's tour of rock death scenes deals tenderly with Cobain fans who won't let go. Add Touré's depressing "The Mystery of Lauryn Hill" and you feel like you're at a '90s memorial. Great speeches, though. **MICHAEL ODELL**



ZAPPA: A BIOGRAPHY

By Barry Miles

☆☆☆ GROVE/ATLANTIC, \$25

Frank Zappa's career embraced a multitude of contradictions. He despised drugs but thrived on coffee and cigarettes; condemned mainstream rock yet bought his wife a Rolls-Royce playing it; scorned authority but insisted on absolute artistic control; and remained married while lovin' the groupies. Barry Miles uncovers the Sicilian patriarch lurking behind the romantic genius in this straight forward yet colorful bio crafted almost entirely from prior books and articles. **RICHARD GEHR**



BLENDER APPROVED

The best BOOKS of 2004



CHRONICLES VOLUME ONE

SIMON & SCHUSTER

Secretive folk-rock poet laureate Bob Dylan finally sets the record straight.



HOWLING AT THE MOON

BROADWAY BOOKS

An un-put-downable repository of A-list gossip and drug-fueled madness.



UNBELIEVABLE: THE LIFE, DEATH AND AFTERLIFE OF THE NOTORIOUS B.I.G.

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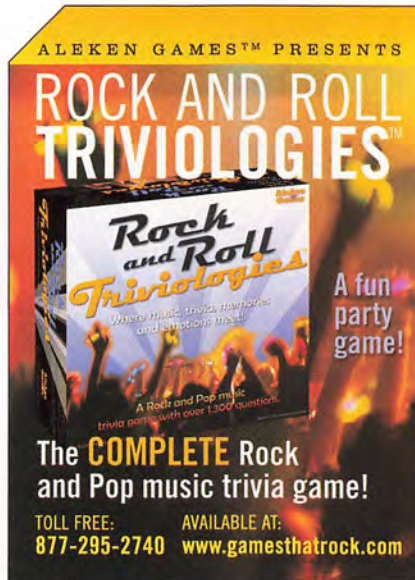
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"Wait. There's a yellow-bellied sapsucker up there. Well I never."

BLOODY HELL

The goriest videogame ever is back, and it's gone comic-book silly. By Jonah Weiner and Gabe Soria

MORTAL KOMBAT: DECEPTION

MIDWAY - PS2, XBOX

☆☆☆

UNTIL 1992, VIDEOGAME death was largely bloodless. Villains were flattened like Wile E. Coyote; they exploded into wreckages of popped springs and blown fuses; they whimpered and collapsed; or they simply faded into the afterlife.

Then came *Mortal Kombat*. Suddenly, death meant ripped heads, torsos melted in fiery blazes and stomachs impaled on giant spikes. Nihilistic and lifelike, it was off-putting stuff. Naturally, it sold like beer at Spring Break.

Twelve years, eight sequels, two movies and one horrible techno soundtrack later, *Mortal Kombat* returns. Now, though, it's comic-book silly and hyper-stylized. Blood still gushes in

fountains and flesh still melts, but this violence is of an unabashedly campy variety. If the original was *Reservoir Dogs*, this is *Kill Bill*: fewer gross-outs, but a lot of fun regardless.

Picking from a host of oddly named martial-arts masters (never mind that Ermac sounds like a vacuum cleaner and Baraka sounds like a breath-freshening spray), you can

either slice your way through tournaments or challenge friends in environments that respond to your action (trees

splinter, walls burst).

Three extra games represent a further departure from the horror roots: When you're tired of one-on-ones, you can play a bloody variation on *Tetris* puzzle-solving, a bloody variation on chess, and a role-playing game. Imagine *Zelda*, had Link periodically set his sword on fire and rammed it into other people's eyeballs.

THE VIOLENCE IS UNABASHEDLY CAMPY.

THE GUIDE GAMES/CROSSWORD



GODZILLA: SAVE THE EARTH

ATARI - PS2, XBOX

Who's really the bad guy? The 200-foot lizardmonsterbeast menacing Japan in ancient movies, or the zillionaire slumlords who build shiny, pretty skyscrapers right in the path of Godzilla's afternoon stroll? *Save the Earth* lets you revel in the destruction of people's homes and kick the ass of a host of aliens bent on world domination, including everyone's favorite homicidal giant moth, Mothra! Argh! ☆☆☆



STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT

LUCASARTS - PS2, XBOX, PC

Battlefront puts the "wars" back in *Star Wars* by showcasing all the nameless grunts who die without fanfare in the films. Players pick a side then follow their character to the death in a gritty bloodbath. The Vietnam-in-space subtext lends unexpected gravity: You'll salute the bravery of Ewok soldiers killed in the line of duty, despite the fact that you're the one mowing the fuzzy bastards down. ☆☆☆



TIME CRISIS: CRISIS ZONE

NAMCO - PS2

Blender loves pointing guns at television, but rarely gets the opportunity to do so, thanks to what the judge called "laws." Thank heaven, then, for games like this, where the sole strategic requirement is to aim a Day-Glo pistol at a screen and blow away heavily armed, hostage-taking baddies. A feature which allows players to duck behind cover in firefights is great for strategists, but trigger-happy maniacs can simply run around with guns a-blazin'. ☆☆☆



X-MEN LEGENDS

ACTIVISION - PS2, XBOX

X-Men Legends skillfully approximates the serial cliffhangers that are the *X-Men* comics' nailbiting trademark, and there are hordes of mutants on hand to put through their super-powered paces. Unfortunately, the game also faithfully approximates tin-eared comic-book scripting, and the creaky dialogue (variations on "Die, X-Men!" repeated ad nauseam) becomes maddening. Luckily, there's a simple solution — your TV's sound-off button. ☆☆☆

BLENDER APPROVED

The best GAMES of 2004



RED DEAD REVOLVER

ROCKSTAR GAMES - PS2, XBOX

It's *Grand Theft Auto* for the dirt roads before there were cars to steal, with spaghetti-Western-style violence for the digital age.



BLOODRAYNE 2

MAJESCO - PS2, XBOX, PC

Tag along on the heartwarming adventures of a stacked vampire assassin with a mind-boggling array of enemy-mutilating methods at her disposal.



PSI-OPS: THE MINDGATE CONSPIRACY

MIDWAY - PS2, XBOX

Sinister plots meet psychics with licenses to kill in this thriller, combining the best of Stephen King and Robert Ludlum, without all those big words.



BY BRENDAN QUIGLEY

DOWN

- 1 British punk band with the 2004 hit "Can't Stand Me Now"
- 2 Jack and Kelly's rock-star dad
- 3 He can't get no satisfaction
- 4 Evanescence's Amy
- 5 1 Down's home city
- 6 1959 Coasters' hit "Poison _____"
- 7 Fat Joe's rap crew (two words)
- 9 Bassist Melissa, formerly of Hole and Smashing Pumpkins (three words)
- 12 Rapper Loc
- 13 G-Unit rapper who's on fire (two words)
- 17 Rolling Stones' 1978 album, _____ *Girls*
- 20 Ritchie _____, subject of the movie *La Bamba*
- 21 The Notorious B.I.G., aka Biggie _____
- 24 They need you tonight
- 25 Guitar legend _____ Paul



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➔ This 24-year-old rapper may seem like a typical baller — he loves jewelry, has four or five bank accounts, is proficient in ass-whooping — but what's all this about a "too small" body part? Hey...

BY ROB TANNENBAUM
PHOTOGRAPHY BY KENNETH CAPPELLO

WHO DOES CHINGY THINK HE IS?

What's that you drew for your self-portrait?

It's a \$1-million bill with my face on it, because "chingy" means "wealthy." Where it should say "In God We Trust," I put "In G.I.B. We Trust." That's Get It Boys, which is my crew, my homeboys. And "4900 BAD" represents where I grew up in St. Louis.

Why did you pick a \$1-million bill, instead of a \$100,000 bill?
Because a million is a lot more than 100,000.

How many millions do you have?
I probably couldn't even tell you. I got, like, four or five accounts.

Any Swiss bank accounts?

No, strictly legal. Now that you mention that, though, I think I'm gonna get one.

What do you spend too much on?
I love jewelry. Right now, I'm wearing a blue-and-white diamond and diamond-stud necklace, blue-diamond-stud earrings in both ears, and a blue-and-white-diamond bracelet. Then I got this princess-cut ring with a 12-carat diamond in the middle, a little round diamond ring, and a silver Gucci watch with princess-cut diamonds and the "G" on the face. It's possible to have too much ice. Say I had on three rings, two watches, two bracelets and six chains. That would be silly.

Do you worry about someone grabbing that huge chain off you?
They ain't gonna get far. They're gonna get their ass beat.

Dogs or cats?

I really don't mess with dogs. I got bit on my ass by a pit bull, and that changed my outlook. I was 15, going over to a home-boy's house, and these dudes were running toward us with bats and chains. I jumped a fence, ran down backyards and alleys, hopped another fence, and the dog was waiting. It bit me on the butt and started pulling my sweatpants down.

Were the dudes after your ice?
I didn't have ice then. I barely had clothes. (Laughs)

What's your astrological sign? What does it reveal about you?

Pisces, March 9. Pisces are sensitive, shy, sneaky and freaky. All those characteristics are right.

So tell us how Chingy gets freaky with a girl.

We'd go to my house and watch a movie — I got a theater in my house — play some pool, go in the studio and let her hear some music. Chill on the balcony, drink a little bit, and eventually we'll go into my room, play some K-Ci and JoJo, R. Kelly or Chingy. I'll tell her to give me a massage. Then I'm going to start feeling on her 'cause she's feeling on me.

If you could change one thing about your body, what would it be?

That's hard, man, 'cause I'm perfect. (Laughs) No, I'm just playing. I'd want normal-sized ears. They're too small, and pointed at the top. (He takes off his Cardinals hat.)

God, you're right. They're kind of Spock-like and —
Oh no, don't.

"I'M SENSITIVE, SHY, SNEAKY AND FREAKY."

Sorry, Mr. Sensitive. Who was the last person you took a swing at?

I got back home one time and went to the mall, and this dude was hating on me in front of people, saying I can't rap, that he should be the one with the deal. At first, I didn't pay attention. As I got to my car, something just clicked in my head and next thing you know, he was getting his ass whooped.

But before you kicked his ass, you took care of the chain, right?
Got to protect the jewelry. [BLENDER]



Makeup by Leslie Barnett for A-listist; Hair by Cherie Johnson



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